NEW SERIAL JUST COMMENCED, PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 371. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 8TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

100 YEARS' WORLD-WIDE RECORD OF SUCCESS.

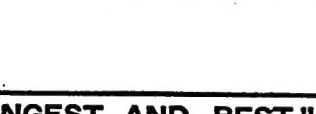
NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS

INDIGESTION BILIOUSNESS HEADACHE
STOMACH & LIVER COMPLAINTS DEBILITY

THE BEST OF ALL TONICS and a GENTLE APERIENT. Mild in Operation, Perfectly Safe, and Free from Injurious Drugs. Sold Everywhere in Bottles at 1/1½, 2/9, and 11/- each.

Ask for "NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS," and do not be persuaded to purchase an imitation.

Prepared by NORTON'S, Limited. 21, Spital Square, London, E.



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FRY'S *Pure Concentrated* COCOA

Awarded Highest Honours. | Over 130 Gold Medals and Diplomas.

Purchasers should ask specially for FRY'S PURE CONCENTRATED COCOA *to distinguish it from other varieties manufactured by the Firm.*

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

OUR NEW VENTURE! Yes, Two Different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! (Copyright).

Whereas, in launching forth our New Production, THE "PRUDENTIAL" CARPETS AND HEARTHRUGS, we beg to state they will have a Rich Turkish and Persian Design on one side, and on the reverse the elegant and costly designs of Wilton make. The advantage thus gained is great, as they can be utilised in various rooms at one cost. This is a valuable step in economy.

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"PRUDENTIAL" Reversible CARPETS

(Registered.)

Reversible, with a different pattern on both sides, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian with the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft., " " "	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft., " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft., " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft., " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft., " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft., " " "	19 6
10½ft. by 12ft., " " "	11/6	12ft. by 21ft., " " "	22/6

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

"Neal Lodge, Upper Norwood, S.E., January 18th, 1896.

The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpet she ordered."

Blairquhan, Maybole, N.B., Augus', 3rd.

Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions, 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg)., to match above Carpets, sent for 1s. 6d. extra, size 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide.

SPECIAL OFFER.—3 Hearthrugs for 4s. 3d.; or 6 for 8s.; or 12 for 15s. 6d.

EXTRAORDINARY REDUCTIONS.

100,000 "ALARM" CARPETS

(*Registered*). **GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.**

Sale Price **2/11** EACH.

This Gigantic Offer is a Special Contract, made with readers of *Short Stories* only. We will forward direct from the looms to any address on receipt of amount, A GENUINE WOVEN, SEAMLESS, REVERSIBLE CARPET, the largest ever sold at the Price.

Suitable for Sitting-room or Bedroom, Bordered and Woven in Art Colours, large enough to cover any ordinary-sized room, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any Middle Profits. Remember these are Woven, not printed, and are made of a material almost equal to Wool. Thousands of these Carpets and Rugs have already been sold at almost double above prices. A Rug sent with Carpet. 10d. extra.

SPECIAL OFFER. 2 Carpets and 2 Rugs ... ... 7s. 6d.

Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

"SHORT STORIES" CARPET COUPON, 8/2/96.

On receipt of this Coupon and P.O.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

All orders dispatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post. Cheques and P.O.'s payable to

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Telegraphic Address—"Eclipse, Leeds." Telephone No. 948.

"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

SUCH AS

Sick Headache, Constipation, Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver & Female Ailments.

ANNUAL SALE SIX MILLION BOXES.

In Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

MRS. JACKSON

An artist's wife, residing at Norton, near Malton, states: "I am deeply grateful to you for the good received through taking your Wind Pills. I suffered severely from

INDIGESTION, SPASMS,

and **LIVER COMPLAINT.** The doctors gave me up as incurable, nor did I think it possible for me to recover. I scarcely dared to eat any food, fearing suffocation. Seeing an advertisement of

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I resolved to try them. After taking a few small boxes I lost all the painful symptoms, and now enjoy good health. Publish my statement as you please."

All sufferers from INDIGESTION, LIVER COMPLAINTS, WIND on the STOMACH, SICK HEADACHE, BILIOUSNESS, etc., should avail themselves of this most excellent medicine.

☛ The Wind Pills being purely Vegetable, Tasteless, and Mild, and Tonic in their action, may be taken with perfect safety by the most delicate of either sex.

Of all Medicine Vendors, at **1s. 1½d.** and **2s. 9d.** Post Free for P.O. or Stamps from

PAGE WOODCOCK, LINCOLN.

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GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.

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TO THE DEAF.

A Gentleman who cured himself of Deafness and Noises in the Head after fourteen years' suffering, will gladly send full particulars of the remedy post free.—Address, H. CLIFTON, Amberley House, Norfolk Street, Strand, London, W.C.

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£20 See Illus. Guide and Catalogue (259 pages), 3d. "How to Open a Cigar Stores, from £20 to £2,000." TOBACCONISTS' OUTFITTING CO., 186, Euston Road, London. (Over 50 years' reputation.) Manager, H. MYERS.

S.S. S.S.
PEARSON'S
£100
COUPON.
No. 6
Feb. 8, 1896.
S.S. S.S.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

ARE YOU LITTLE?

If so, wear the "*A D*" Invisible Elevators (Regd.). Will increase your height up to four inches; the only approved means; detection impossible; simple, inexpensive. Send stamped envelope for particulars to the ORIENTAL TOILET CO. (B 5 Dept.), 87, Strand, London.

DOUGLAS, HUNGERFORD, AND WILLIAMS.

PROFITS PAID DURING 1895.

Jan. 2, £8 per cent., Feb. 1, £6, Mar. 1, £5, April 1, £8, May 1, £7, June 2, £10, July 1, £9, Aug. 1, £9, Sept. 2, £8, Oct. 1, £8, Nov. 1, £7, Dec. 2, £7.

Total for 12 months £92 per cent., an average of nearly £8 PER CENT. PER MONTH.

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OUR NEW ILLUSTRATED MANUAL mailed free upon request, showing how these profits may be made WITHOUT SPECULATION. Cheques for profits mailed promptly 1st of each month, and for withdrawals of capital on 2nd and 16th of each month. Trial investments of £5 and upwards may be made.

We have not a dissatisfied Client.

DOUGLAS, HUNGERFORD, & WILLIAMS, 5, Copthall Avenue, London, E.C., and 11, Place de la Bourse, Paris.

SULPHOLINE LOTION,

For clearing the skin from Spots, Blemishes, Redness, Roughness, giving a Beautiful Complexion and pleasing appearance.

SHILLING BOTTLES.

HAIR DESTROYED permanently and absolutely by an entirely new and harmless self-treatment, total destruction guaranteed. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope. Prof. F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

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Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home-cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

TOO STOUT

Dr. Grey's **FAT REDUCING** Pills.

A safe, rapid, and permanent reduction and improvement in health and breathing guaranteed. A special preparation kept for stubborn cases (either sex) which have resisted other treatment.

ABDOMINAL OBESITY A SPECIALTY.

2/9 and 4/6 per box, plain wrapper, post free to all parts. Dr. O. GREY, 57, Weymouth St., Portland Pl., London, W.

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4 Best "E's" (samples) 9d., post free.

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TOOTH-ACHE

CURED INSTANTLY BY

BUNTER'S NERVINE

Prevents Decay. Saves Extraction. Sleepless Nights Prevented. Neuralgic Headache and all Nerve Pains Removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d.

KNOW THYSELF! YOUR CHARACTER, APTITUDES, and CAREER marvellously described from Handwriting by distinguished Graphologist. Business Guidance. Success ensured. Fee 2s. Professor CARONA, F.B.I.M.S., 126, Ledbury Road, Bayswater, W.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A lady who has permanently destroyed Superfluous Hairs on herself, will be happy to forward free, to all similarly afflicted, full particulars of a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment. Send stamped addressed envelope in confidence to Mrs. "T. D.," 87, Strand, London.

TWO PENNY STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 371.] [ONE PENNY

For the Week ending February 8th, 1896

LOVE ROMANCE WARFARE ADVENTURE MYSTERY PATHOS

A FAIRY TALE OF MODERN DAYS.

SAT looking at Ruth, more and more puzzled each moment.

At school she had been noted for her hair, which was a mass of bronze-brown that caught the light like burnished copper; but, although her eyes were dark and her features were good, yet we were often led to exclaim: "Why is it that Ruth is not a beauty?" We finally agreed that it must be her lack of manner, for she was diffident to an extreme, and even dull at times. But for some strange reason she always held a strong attraction for me, I could never tell why, and I felt sorry a few years later when I heard she had married a young mechanic, and begun life in a very small way.

Seven years had elapsed before we were thrown together again, and I was utterly unprepared for the superbly beautiful woman who met me so charmingly, and renewed our acquaintance with such native grace. Her features were clear cut and refined, her complexion divinely fair, her hair more bronze and coppery than ever, her carriage erect and queenly, but her eyes—there was something there which fascinated me. I can call it nothing but the gleam of conscious power.

She seemed utterly out of place in her little cottage home, dressed in a simple cashmere, guiltless of ornament, with only a linen collar about her neck. To me she seemed many degrees above the husband, who but lately had become a master mechanic, and was now in possession of a fairly good salary. He was a determined sort of a man, and owned the little home in which they lived—one of the kind of men who are more regardful of the future than the present, all of which was very prudent and proper, of course, but I looked at Ruth and wondered and wondered. It seemed so strange, so remarkable that she should have developed in such a marvellous fashion in such a narrow place in life. I am possessed of an intense penetration, and divined that it was some

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unseen, unknown influence that had changed her from the diffident girl to the beautiful woman.

Perhaps it was a little wicked of me, but I could not resist saying: "Ruth, how can you possibly be content with what fate has brought you? Don't you ever long for riches, and power, and station, for gems and jewels, for silks and velvets, wealthy neighbours who live so near you? Why, Ruth, you are fitted to shine in society; it is a crime that you are not in your rightful place."

A strange expression sprang into her eyes. She smiled with a meaning I could not fathom. I resolved to strike fire if there was any in her. "Your husband is a good man, of course, but he is not your mate. A woman as beautiful and accomplished as you should have married a prince and have lived in a palace."

"Perhaps I have," she said curiously.

It was my turn to be taken by surprise.

"No; you need not think to fill me with discontent, my friend. I have no regret at what fate has brought me. I am happier by far in this little cottage than most women in their palaces of splendour. Shall I tell you why? Because I have had a terrible experience. I once allowed myself to be covetous and discontented, and—I wonder if you could understand if I told you the story?" A bright rose colour spread over her cheek, a little flame burnt in her eyes. "Go on, go on!" I cried. "I *knew* you had a secret."

"I shall never forget the day that came near wrecking my life. It was two years ago, and grand receptions were given by two of the wealthy neighbours who live so near me. Awnings were stretched down to the street, and beautifully-dressed women slipped from their carriage doors and floated in like fairies rather than mortals. The strains of dance-music came tantalisingly to my ears and stirred all the evil there was in me, latent and unknown before.

"The next day, I remember, I was so discontented with my lot that I fairly despised the clothes I wore and the walls that encompassed me. Philip was trying hard to make the first payment on our home, but I remember that on that particular day I even regretted having married him and wished I were free to choose again, and I would wed riches and live in splendour, like my wealthy neighbours. I was so tired of being poor and working hard without any little pleasures to lighten my burdens. I knew it was wicked, but I was so tired mentally and physically that I didn't even care. I put the baby to sleep that night completely out of humour, wondering why I never had any of the delights of life, but only the shadows and clouds. A woman cannot indulge in such emotions without punishment, and you shall see what I had to suffer in consequence.

"Now I cannot explain; you will have to let me tell it all just as it happened, without any explanation, for there is none. I had hardly closed my eyes in sleep when I felt a strange lightness of spirit take possession of me, and a peculiar attraction drawing me fairly out of my body—if you can conceive of it—and taking me on and on through space, till I came to a brilliantly-lighted palace. In a moment I was led to an apartment by a number of richly-dressed women, who seemed waiting for me, saying: 'Here is your wardrobe; chose what you will wear.'

"Dazzled by the brilliancy of everything about me, such as I had never dreamed of in my life, I could scarcely tell what I wanted; but they said: 'Hurry off that common brown dress; the prince will be scandalised.' And they loosed my poor gown, and it dropped on the floor, while they arrayed me in something shiny and silvery, and all floating around me in silken billows, and they put a filmy silvery veil upon my head, and wound diamonds about my throat and waist as carelessly as if they had been garlands. In a moment I was in the midst of music, and arm-in-arm with a magnificent-looking man with a royal pride upon his face. Before I knew what I was doing, we were standing before a patriarchal priest, and married by a kind of ceremony, I know not what. Delicious music filled the air, a banquet was waiting, and then feats of magic and marvellous dancing passed before us, as we sat on our chairs of state, like king and queen.

"I was in a joyous exultation. I felt as if at last I had reached the place intended for me—such is the extent of human pride—and when at last the vision faded, and I sought for my cotton dress to go home in, and woke to find myself in the humble place I had left a few hours before, I exclaimed: 'Oh, what a beautiful dream!'

"Just wait a moment. Don't laugh and say 'It was a dream,' for you will discover differently. All day I was in an excited state, and when at night I closed my eyes I hoped I would dream the same dream over again. In a moment I felt the same lightness of spirit and the same attraction, and soon found my way back into the realm of the night before, but with the difference that 'the prince'—as they called him—himself escorted me to the dressing-room, and waited for me to put off my common dress, and array myself in some of the splendid garments at my command. I chose a royal robe of something deliciously like an Arabian Nights' story—a blending of all colours woven with gold—and advanced to meet him. He led me into a great reception-hall, and there were renewed the delights of the night before, which finished in much the same manner.

"Now, the next day I was in a feverish state of excitement, and entirely forgot the humble walls about me, or the tired husband working for our daily bread. I went through my various duties in a mechanical way, thinking of the delights of the night before, and wondering whether I should ever see my prince again. No thought of wrong or culpability had entered my head. I was like a child playing a game.

"I may as well say that this was but the beginning of my peculiar existence, for each night I sought the wonderful realm, and spent the night in the midst of luxury and splendour, getting through the day like one in a daze, believing the real to be the dream, and the dream to be the real life. I came to know the people in this new world much better than my neighbours around me. The patriarchal priest proved to be the tutor of the prince, and as time went by I woke up from my mistaken idea that this was merely dreaming, as I had so innocently supposed.

"One night, as the prince kissed me good-night, I said, suddenly remembering my other life: 'But it seems to me that my husband has blue eyes, while yours are as black as night. How strange it would be if this were all a mistake.' And I woke up instantly.

"Sitting up and looking around me, I realised that I was under a spell of some kind, and all day felt a sense of responsibility stealing over me. I knew it was my duty to resist this glamour, but was so under its mastery that I could not. I tried to tell Philip, but he only laughed at me, and I found I was doomed to a dual existence.

"I can only remember it now in snatches—little bits here and there. I remember the tutor had a wicked, keen

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eye, and that he and the prince always seemed acting in unison. Up to a certain time I had been very much as I was in my little home—rather dull (that is outside of my sense of luxurious enjoyment)—and drinking in rather than expressing any thought upon the strange things around me. But all at once this changed, as I became possessed of a desire to comprehend the spell under which I found myself. I remember the tutor—his name was Michael Velitski—glancing at me curiously when I asked:

"'What do you do when you leave here?'

"'We are travelling—the prince and I.'

"'How delightful! Tell me what you have seen. How I would love to travel.'

"And then he would tell me the most wonderful tales of Eastern lands, and I would drink them in, and ask for more.

"'You will make a good pupil,' he said. Then turning to the prince: 'We have not made a mistake this time.'

"Now this puzzled me very much, and I resolved not to rest until I had found out what it meant. My every faculty became on the alert, every thought day and night bent upon comprehending the strange world in which I found myself. Nothing escaped my notice, and I devoted myself to books and studies, and the many occult mysteries around us, filling the very atmosphere we breathed.

"All at once, suddenly, a revulsion of feeling took possession of me. I grew weary of the high pressure state of living, the intense excitement, even the splendour and magnificence palled upon me, and I grew to hate the prince and his tutor, and the people they had around them. I began to think my humble little home the most beautiful spot in the world, and my chubby little boy, and my noble, hard-working husband, as the chief joys of my life. I loved them as never before, but this horrid spell was upon me—one that could not be broken by ordinary methods. I became as one possessed, resolved to escape if possible, as the horrors of my situation dawned upon me. So lightly and so gradually had the chain been forged upon me that I had not realised it until I was bound fast.

"Wrath and resentment began to burn in my breast, and at last one night I said: 'Why do you call me here night after night? I am tired of it all, and wish to be released.' But they laughed at me, and the tutor looked positively satanic. 'I tell you I am tired of this unreal world, and I demand that you release me.'

"'We are married,' said the prince, with an evil smile; 'there is no escape till death.'

"'Then let death free us now!' I cried. And, seizing a jewelled dagger lying near, I plunged it into his heart. They both laughed at me as the prince took it out and handed it to me with a mocking smile.

"I was astonished. Here was a law different from the other life.

"'Can there be no death here?' I cried.

"'Calm yourself,' said the tutor, 'and begin your studies afresh. For fifty years have I studied the laws of the occult world, and never yet have I seen a death in the occult state. If we could be easily killed while in this condition we should scarcely dare to meet so freely, or we should be at each other's mercy, indeed. No, begin your studies afresh and you will find that death can result only from injury inflicted by mortal hand upon the mortal body.'

"Finding that it was only by understanding the laws of the world that I was in that I could hope to escape, I devoted myself to the most diligent study, and soon persuaded the tutor that I was in perfect harmony with the plans of himself and the prince. Ah, I needed all the cunning of the fox and all the wisdom of the serpent to carry me through the trial, for each day I was becoming more frantic.

"'How you have changed, Ruth?' said my husband to me; 'your eyes have a gleam in them which is positively murderous at times. What does it mean?' But what was the use of telling him? He could not help me. He would not believe.

"'So neither dagger, poison, or bullet can kill an astral body?' I asked the tutor one night, trying to find out all I could.

"'No; only the mortal body can be injured. Each astral body is connected with its mortal envelope by a luminous thread, ten million times finer than that of a spider, and death can ensue only by severing this thread, which may be done only by a shock to the earthly or mortal body. So you may amuse yourself by every kind of injury to the prince's astral body that you choose. He is perfectly safe.'

"All this time it was kept concealed from me where or in what land the prince and his tutor really were: and I discovered that even astral bodies had their limitations, and could not go in quest of each other against his or her will. We were held in a kind of thrall at the prince's bidding; and yet, in spite of his power, he had his limitations as well as we. Much as he desired to follow me to my home, I found that by a tremendous opposition I could prevent his doing so. Another thing I discovered was that even *he* could not remain in the occult state, and out of his mortal body, beyond a limited time, and many more things which I will not stop to tell. Enough to say that, bit by bit, I unravelled the mystery of the spell placed upon me.

"The tutor was an old man of seventy, who had devoted his entire life to the study of what is now termed occultism; the prince, who was of Russian birth, had been placed under his tuition in extreme youth, and was drawn into its meshes successfully. At last they discovered the power of freeing the astral body from the earthly body, and, by united effort, drew to themselves others of a similar nature as companions. They had built this realm of pleasure by pure will-power, and by the same means drew to themselves from all over the world new elements to sustain it.

"Their theory was that every object in Nature or art had an astral form as well as a real one, and these they drew together and combined to make up the magnificence around us. In their travels they ceaselessly gathered astral shapes of every treasure, every splendour for their occult palace and wonderful realm. They had discovered, however, the need of a woman's nature to unravel some of the intricacies for them—a woman who would be pliable, and yet possess sufficient will to add to their power.

"The day that I had allowed myself to become so discontented they had exercised a tremendous spell of attraction for just such a woman as I, and so I fell into the snare. They now had new and wonderful experiments they wished to make, and it was expected that I would lend them my powers of will, and strength, and acumen, to accomplish the grand purpose, now that I had discovered that resistance was useless. But my every sense was on the alert, and I was most keen in trying to find a loophole of escape, for daily I hated them more and more.

"I often noticed a strange look of pity on the women's

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faces around me, but could get no answer from them. They were silent on the only theme on which I cared to talk.

"'Why will you not tell me what this dreadful spell means?' I would say to them; 'can you not help me to escape?'

"'We dare not,' said one, who was called Nerissa; 'the prince's will is absolute.'

"'But tell me.' I intreated, 'how did you all happen to come here first?'

"'The same way that you did,' said Nerissa sadly.

"'Were you married to the prince?' I asked quickly

"Every eye was averted, every head hung in tacit admission. In an instant I understood that this was the meaning of Michael Velitski when he said: 'We have not made a mistake this time.' But why had each been dethroned in turn, and reduced to this subjection. A new horror began to steal over me.

"By this time I had learned many things of occult influence, and, by a certain extent of absolute opposition to the prince, I bent Nerissa to my will. Through her I should learn the extent of my bondage. I had only a moment at a time, but by constant effort I finally gained the truth.

"Each of these women in her earthly form had been discontented with her lot, and in this state of mind had been subject to the mighty influence exerted by the prince and Velitski coming at their bidding. Each in turn had been wedded to the prince, and each in turn had fallen in love with him so deeply, and so absolutely, that she had lost all power of will, and thus was no further use to him. Each in turn had been reduced to the position of a dependent, and held there absolutely. They displayed no jealousy of me as a rival—they were scarcely more than automatons. I felt sure that there was no danger of my being reduced to their sad plight. I was too self-willed and positive, and, moreover, I hated the prince. But, instead of this comforting me, it made me only the more frantic in my desire to escape.

"At last—one night—they were more than usually confident, and I heard them speak inadvertently of 'the ship.' 'That means that they are on the ocean somewhere,' I said to myself.

"'What part of the world are you in now?' I asked boldly.

"The prince laughed. 'You wouldn't believe me, would you, if I should tell you that at this moment we are living on the morning star?'

"It was useless, I thought, to hope to catch him off his guard, yet I feigned to laugh, as if I enjoyed his reply as being very witty indeed.

"The next morning, with aching head and throbbing brow, I bemoaned my fate, feeling that I was perhaps doomed to this awful existence for the remainder of my life. I picked up the morning paper absently, and the first thing my eye fell upon was an item regarding the ship *Morning Star*, which was due on a certain date in the Thames.

"In a moment I was roused, every pulse in my body on fire. This ship was on its way to the Thames, bringing the hated prince and his tutor directly across my path. They were dangerous enough in the occult world, what would they be in the real? Should I become mesmerised and controlled by them body as well as soul? I knew not what powers they might possess over me—I might be induced to commit crimes. Surely I had reason to despair.

"Then all at once a revelation came to me—all at once I saw a gleam of hope, a method of escape. I had not studied the occult sciences in vain. All at once I saw a flaw, a weak spot, in the vital part of the whole structure.

"A tremendous resolve took possession of me; I prepared myself for the fantastic revel of the night as never before. I would lend myself to every device that should deceive them, and when the summons came I went eagerly—I had a purpose. So well did I simulate harmony with their plans, and so great was my strength of will in aiding them, that they fell into a rapture of delight.

"'My sweet Ruth, what should we do without you?' said the prince. 'I wonder if you are half as bright and clever in your earthly form as you are in your astral body?' and he gave me a strange glance.

"'Why don't you come and see?' I asked carelessly.

"'Perhaps I shall,' he replied.

"'Are you not afraid I shall plunge a real knife into your real heart?'

"'Not at all. I shall hold you there by a stronger power than I do here.' It seemed as if two fires burnt in his eyes.

"'Do you have this power over Nerissa in her earthly form, that she is so weak and subjective?' I asked carelessly, trying to conceal my intentness, 'because I should not like that.'

"He gave an impatient, scornful exclamation. 'Nerissa? Bah! *Her* mortal body is in a madhouse.'

"Something in my brain gave way in spite of my tremendous effort at self-control. But resolutely I steadied myself. The moment had come. This occult palace, with all its people, was but the construction of man. Even here there were limitations. This world of splendour and mysteries was built upon a foundation as light and insecure as the clouds themselves. It had no God. This, my woman's nature, had felt from the first. This was the grand plan, and by means of it I would topple this occult kingdom from its place and cast it to the winds of heaven. I had resolved to use my counterforce of will to keep them in the occult state far beyond the limited time until they were weakened, and thus my power should be greater for the purpose I had planned.

"I steadied myself. I felt a mighty power growing within me, but born of desperation and desire.

"They were ready to go. The prince kissed me goodnight, as usual, and said: 'I have a surprise in store for you——'

"'And I for you,' I said intently. 'To-night is the last time that we shall meet.'

"The prince laughed mockingly, but the keen eyes of Velitski showed a new expression—a vague sense of distrust. Too late he realised that I could be dangerous without any weapons but my wits and the intuitions of a woman's nature. Each moment I detained them placed them more at my mercy, for they had overstayed their time, and I, coming so much later at their summons, was still strong and vigorous.

"'Please God, this is the last time you shall ever bring me here,' I said solemnly. 'You have wonderful powers, but you are only men after all. In your might and pride you have built this world, and brought us here against our wills, but you have forgotten there is a God,' and I fell upon my knees and clasped my hands in prayer. I felt that my powers of importuning that moment would carry my prayer straight to Deity, and regardless of the mocking laughter of the prince, I implored that supernatural agency of some kind might be sent to destroy the power of these fiendish men who held our souls in thrall.

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"'We must go!' cried the tutor. 'She will kill us if she keeps us here. It is already beyond our time.' But I had them bound by the very power they held over me; at last my will was the stronger, and they could not go.

"Meanwhile I still prayed unceasingly, feeling intuitively that I was heard. I made my vow then and there, that if I could but once be released I would never again cherish a discontented thought in my breast as long as I should live. The prince still mocked, but the uncanny old man stood trembling, while Nerissa and the others gathered round in wonder.

"All at once Velitski cried out in agony: 'Something has happened!' and he fell prone upon the floor. 'My God! death is coming! The ship is on fire!'

"And the prince gave a scream—such a scream as the tiger gives when he is shot to the heart. And then I saw a gleam of faintly luminous thread, and it was broken. The struggle of death was not long, and, like vapour, the astral bodies of the prince and Velitski floated upon the air, and, amid wondering exclamations, the palace of wonder faded into nothingness.

"By my side was Nerissa, trembling with a new-found clearness of mind, yet scarcely knowing herself. 'You are free, Nerissa!' I cried; 'you are free! We have escaped this thraldom worse than death. Thank Him who is above all!' And then I knew no more.

"When I awoke I was surprised to find Philip leaning over me with tears in his eyes, and to this day I have not recovered from the shock of learning that three weeks had elapsed between that awful night and the morning I awoke—three weeks utterly lost from my reckoning. I made a complete confession to my husband, but he treated the whole thing as a chimera of my brain, and thought I was lightheaded whenever I spoke of it, so that I have ceased to mention the matter. But from that day I have been only too glad to lead my simple life with what fate has brought me. I think my little home the loveliest in the world, and I actually glory in my plain woollen gown."

"But, Ruth, dear," I said, "it is very evident that the whole thing *was* a chimera of your brain, and a fantastic one, too."

"How about the education I received, and the ideas on occultism which I never heard of, even until then; and the powers which I developed, and have since been trying to lose in order to become an ordinary human being?" said she, calmly looking me straight in the eye.

"Well, that is very wonderful, of course."

"How about the ship, *Morning Star*, which was burned at sea on its way to this port that very night, and whose crew and passengers all escaped, save two—an old man and a young man—both Russians, who could not be wakened in spite of all efforts to arouse them?"

"Ruth, you don't mean to say that such is the fact?"

She gave me a triumphant smile. "If the captain of the *Morning Star* told the truth, it is; and this was the story he told on his arrival in London."

"Almost thou persuadest me to believe," said I musingly, looking into the wondrous depths of her eyes, fascinated by that singular gleam of conscious power.

And then Philip came in, and I saw that she greeted him with a most radiant smile and brightening eyes. Still, as I glanced from the simple surroundings to Philip's mean attire and horny hands to the beautiful woman, with her bronze-tinted hair and queenly carriage, I thought to myself:

"I wonder if she never really regrets her lost palace and her wonderful prince?"

Ella Sterling Cummins.

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BY WINIFRED GRAHAM. *Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.*

SUMMARY.

Philip Roche marries Eleanor Grebby, daughter of a farmer, and they spend their honeymoon on the Continent.

CHAPTER III.

God made the woman for the man.—*Tennyson.*

"OH, do stop and take me to tea in that lovely confectioner's shop!" cries a pleading voice, while an eager hand flourishes a parasol which pokes the driver in the back. "Oh, I wish I could speak the horrid language."

"But, my dear," replies the man at her side, "you have only just had your coffee and unlimited bon-bons. I want to show you Brussels thoroughly. It is a most interesting town."

Eleanor Roche sighs. To her uncultivated mind the magnificent Hotel de Ville, the Roman Catholic Churches, galleries, picturesque towers, gables, and doorways of ancient buildings, hold but little charm.

She is madly excited about the bonnet and boot shops, the lace fans and collars, chocolates, and ice creams.

Philip is bent on enlarging his wife's mind, and hopes to awake in her his fervent love for art. Surely in time she will learn to appreciate it. At present she is decidedly slow of comprehension. Though looking lovelier than ever in her new Parisian toilettes, Eleanor disappoints him. She talks perpetually of her appearance, dresses three or four times a day, revels in admiring glances from male tourists, and displays strange apathy when sight-seeing.

"How ugly the foreign women are!" exclaims Eleanor, "so short, plump, and round. Why, even our miller's daughters could lick them into fits."

Her slang jars on him, but Eleanor is so sublimely unconscious of offence and childishly contented with herself that he has not the heart to murmur.

Besides, even the touch of her small hand thrills him with the old pleasure.

She surveys her feet admiringly.

"Did you ever see such lovely shoes? The points are like needles. It would be wicked to walk in them. Oh, dear, where are we stopping now?"

"At the Church of St. Gudule. You must see it before we go. The pulpit is wonderful."

Eleanor gathers up her silken skirts and steps lightly to the pavement.

She thinks this part of the honeymoon very dry, when there are cafés, music, and shops at hand.

"Isn't the carving beautiful?" murmurs her husband, examining the pulpit with fresh interest, from the fact that Eleanor is visiting his favourite places.

"You see, dear," taking her arm, "it is supported on the Tree of Knowledge, and of Life. Adam and Eve are being driven out of Paradise on one side by the Angel, while Death is gliding round with his dart."

"Ugh!" says Eleanor, shivering slightly, "what a nasty subject to choose. If you had been Adam at Copthorne, and thought you would gain anything by eating our apples, wouldn't you have devoured the lot?—that is to say, if I, as Eve, had been unselfish enough to leave any!"

She laughs at her own humour.

"It is scarcely a subject to jest upon," whispers Philip.

Eleanor's bright eyes sadden instinctively.

How has she displeased him?

"It is a marvellous piece of workmanship," he murmurs, as they move away.

He wonders if Eleanor, who has never even heard of "Rubens," feels her ignorance; but his thought is unconsciously answered by her careless, yet happy, air when he imparts his wisdom. Her great, expressive eyes seem to say: "I have no doubt it is very interesting to you, but I have so much else to think of."

Having escaped from the bewildering pulpit out into the fresh air, her spirits rise, while her fancy turns to the tempting pastry in the shop windows.

She catches sight of her face and form in a mirror as they pass to one of the small round tables, ordering coffee and cakes. Her heart kindles with love for her own beautiful being. It is not actual conceit, but genuine, unbiassed admiration for Mother Nature's handiwork.

A young Englishman of insipid appearance is seated opposite, enjoying the mild pleasure of an ice *à la panache*. He puts up his eyeglass and stares at Eleanor. She returns the look frankly, taking in his narrow forehead, ginger hair, and elongated neck.

"Newly married," thinks the man, noting the fresh lustre of her jewellery.

"English," mentally ejaculates Eleanor, eyeing his scrupulously clean linen.

"A woman to be loved and hated in the same breath," so runs his masculine meditation. "Tantalising open eyes, without a blush in them, and a face like the bust of Clytie."

"What is engrossing your attention, dearest?" whispers Philip, seeing her pre-occupied.

"I am wondering if that young man's mother ever thought him handsome. The nose might have been promising once, before the last half inch grew, and his hair was gold when she first cut his ringlets."

Philip looks at the stranger's dissipated eyes, and despite the apparent innocence which the hallowing presence of a guileless ice-cream will temporarily shed over Lothario himself, sees the general demoralisation that has set in.

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Kneels at her feet to repair the damage.

"He is young to be blunted and coarsened," thinks Philip. Annoyed by the the impudent stare which possibly amuses rather than displeases his wife, he tells Eleanor she has had enough, and rises to signify departure. Lothario is still covering Clytie with his gaze. She pauses to caress a lean black cat with hungry eyes, that has crept in unobserved from the street. Hurriedly emptying a jug of cream in her saucer, Eleanor is about to present it to the plaintive stranger. Tom, however, scents the cream, springs on his hind legs, and upsets the liquid over her Parisian skirt.

The insipid young man starts forward, for Philip is paying at the counter, and kneels at her feet to repair the damage with his handkerchief.

Mrs. Roche stands watching helplessly, her lips curving into smiles.

"You are very kind," she murmurs, as his eyeglass falls amongst her chiffons. "The cat was hungry, and now he won't get anything. Philip will not stay and ——"

She breaks off shortly, for her husband has turned and discovered the youth on his knees before Eleanor, who, as he rises, slips his card into her hand.

"I will see the cat's fed," he whispers.

She gives him a grateful glance, and explaining the incident to Philip, hurries away, with the stranger's card hidden in her pale kid glove.

When she is back in the hotel, Eleanor looks at the name.

Herbert Dallison,

Junior Conservative Club.

"I don't suppose we shall ever meet again," she says to herself reflectively. "But he must be kindhearted, or he wouldn't have troubled about my dress or the cat."

Though Eleanor Roche is so in love with her own lustrous eyes, she does not yet realise how much goodwill they can win her. She has yet to learn that the dangerous gift of a subtle charm may make or mar its owner's life.

"We have only one more day here," says Philip, who had mapped out their tour, "and I want you to see 'Waterloo,' dearest."

"Is it amusing?" asks Eleanor.

"Well, interesting is more the word."

"Then I probably shall not care for it. The places you call interesting are so dull!"

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However, Philip carries out his plan, and takes her to the little straggling village of Braue l'Alleud. The churchyard full of English graves and monuments quite distresses Eleanor.

"To think of all these brave men dying nobly for their country, and then being buried in this out-of-the-way place," she exclaims.

"I suppose it is all the same to them," replies Philip.

Herbert Dallison stands beside her.

"But I don't like the idea, nor am I fond of the sight of graves, and the thought of death. Oh, Philip! what is that fat old man saying to you?"

"He wants to show us a grave over the Marquis of Anglesea's leg, and is the proud possessor of the house where it was amputated. It was buried in a polished coffin, and has a monument erected to its memory. But who *are* you eyeing so intently, Eleanor?" turning as he speaks. "Why! If it isn't that impudent young puppy again, who mopped up the milk!"

"Cream, Philip, cream."

"Well! don't look at him, darling," putting his arm through hers to draw her gently away. "We will escape from the voluble Belgian with the leg story. He wants to show us the boot that once cased the foot. Such a fuss about nothing!"

Eleanor returns to the carriage, but as they drive to the huge mound with the Belgic Lion on the summit, she is conscious that Herbert Dallison is following.

For the rest of the day he always seems only a yard from her, as they examine the red walls pitted by bullets, and wander round the Museum. He has a party of friends with him—Eleanor can hear them chaffing the guide, and ridiculing everything. Their absurd remarks amuse her, from time to time she laughs for no apparent reason.

At last she owns to fatigue, and Philip leaves her, while he goes in search of their carriage.

"Would you like some relics?" says a voice at her elbow.

Eleanor knows who is speaking before she looks round. Herbert Dallison stands beside her, holding out a French forage cap, a bullet, and a rusty sword broken off in the middle.

She seizes them delightedly.

"Thank you, thank you; but please go away," as Philip's figure looms in sight.

She does not need to ask twice. Herbert Dallison seems to vanish into thin air.

"You silly child!" cries Philip laughingly, "to spend your money on those so-called 'relics' manufactured at Birmingham or Brussels to beguile innocent tourists. A fresh crop of bullets and swords, I'm told, is sown every year, that you may have the pleasure of seeing them turned up yourself."

Eleanor smiles a little nervously. She is beginning to wish she had not taken the presents. What would Philip say if he knew?

He helps her into the carriage with her spoil, the giver following with his party in the rear.

Eleanor becomes momentarily more conscience-stricken; the sight of the "relics" are hateful to her.

"I want to throw all this rubbish away," she cries at last. "It will only be a worry to me."

"Very true," replies her husband.

"I know," a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "Let me shy them out on the road, and someone will think they have discovered real curiosities."

She stands up in childish glee, casting back a mocking smile at Herbert Dallison. One by one she flings his gifts from her, with an expressive look signifying second thoughts are best. He has taken his friends into his confidence, and is horrified at the hilarious laughter which breaks from them at Eleanor's act.

"Hang it all," he mutters, "it's beastly ungrateful; can't buy that sort of rot for nothing."

But he is too proud to stop and recover his property, so a bullet, a cap, and a sword are left by the wayside like the seed that was not good, to pass into strange hands.

"Moral," cries Bertie's pal, slapping him on the back, "don't interfere with honeymoon couples, they're abominably slow. Stick to widows, old man, for the future."

At the word "widow" Bertie actually blushes. There is more sting in this light chaff than his comrades suppose, for the vision of a villa at Richmond with its dark-haired divinity rises between the dust of the two carriages, soothing his ruffled feelings and drowning Eleanor's fair form in the seas of forgetfulness.

The honeymoon slips by pleasantly.

Mrs. Roche enjoys the long railway journeys above everything, which astonishes Philip, who thinks them the worst part of the trip.

"You see I so seldom go in trains," Eleanor says when he expresses surprise. "I love to listen to the whizz of the engine, and see the rushing, panting people on the stations worrying the grand officials in their smart uniforms. Then it is so nice to be first-class, and lean back on the cushions and cock up your feet if you wish. Besides, it is awfully jolly just to look out of the window and think."

"What do you think of?" asks her husband.

"All the beautiful presents you have given me, and the house on the lovely terrace at Richmond where I am to live."

The pleasure she takes in little things is a daily marvel to Philip. In the train, for instance, every moment she opens her dressing-bag, to shake scent from a silver bottle over her hands or peep in a dainty glass at her complexion. Each time they stop something fresh must be bought—a bunch of grapes, a bag of red plums, flowers, and unwholesome-looking tarts.

She actually purchases a tumbler of lager beer, drinking it with relish, declaring it is quite home-like and jolly.

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Eleanor never worries about anything. Should the train be missed or the luggage stray, it is all the same to her. An hour's wait on a dull little platform is never grumbled at. "We'll just have to sit and whistle," she declares, and amuses herself mimicking the porters, which she succeeds in doing wonderfully well, while Philip, in spite of numerous eccentricities, forgives her everything, and worships her devotedly.

"Alas! that we have to return," he sighs, as they glide in a small boat on the Lake of Geneva. "I must be back in the city this week."

"And you will make me *lots* of money?" expanding her eyes and showing her beautiful teeth.

"Won't you be contented with a little?"

"Oh, no. I want to entertain. You must bring your friends from London, and the house you have so long neglected shall be packed with guests."

"We'll see about that," says Philip, not liking to damp her ardour. "You must remember, though, that I am not a walking gold mine, little wife."

"Can the boatman understand what we say?"

"He only knows a smattering of English. What a strong, steady stroke he pulls!" Eleanor leans over the side, gazing down the clear depths.

"I never saw such wonderful water; you can see ever so far below. How amusing it would be to drop pebbles in and watch them sink."

"Here is a stray one on the seat," said Philip, throwing it overboard. Eleanor watches the descent with sparkling eyes.

"It is still in sight," she cries, "whirling through the water! My word! how clear the lake is. I must see it again."

She glances round, but there are no more stones.

Before Philip has time to stop her she opens her purse and drops a coin over the side of the boat.

"Look!' there it goes," laughing lightly. "Isn't it fascinating?"

The rower has stopped, and with eager, covetous eyes watches the wilful waste. Those coins would mean bread to him and his children, while she throws them to feed the

"Stop, Eleanor!" he says sternly.

deep! Another and yet another fall from her slim hands.

Philip has turned quite pale with anger.

"Stop! Eleanor," he says sternly, "you do not realise what you are doing. It is wicked."

But she shrugs her shoulders and drops another.

"Do you hear what I say," he mutters, grasping her wrist. "I'll have no more of this. Look at that poor fellow's eyes; why, he would like to murder you. It is enough to call down the judgment of Heaven upon us."

"Just one more, only five centimes, Philip, and the man shall have all that is left in my purse."

"No," he replies, still retaining her arm in an iron grip.

"Don't; you hurt me."

He removes his hand, and with a defiant look Eleanor

She is standing gazing on them joyfully.

flings the coin into the lake, watching it whirl below with redoubled interest.

"Gott!" mutters the boatman under his breath, "what tevilry."

Then, without a sign of shame, Eleanor passes a handful of money to the sunburnt fellow, casting a smile of ineffable sweetness upon him.

"For the little ones," she says.

But Philip's brow is still black.

"It was wicked," he repeats.

Eleanor only laughs.

"You deserve to want in the future."

"The future," she replies lightly, "who thinks of the future? It may be dark enough to frighten the very life out of you—a thing to make you scream——"

Philip shudders. Storm clouds are gathering overhead. This is the last day of his honeymoon.

CHAPTER IV.

Life is a Jest.

A great red sun that is warm and kind sinks behind the golden trees, rich with autumnal tints, as Philip and Eleanor drive up to "Lyndhurst," on Richmond Terrace.

"So this is your home—*my* home?" she cries, her eyes sparkling with delight as they rest on her new abode. "Ring very loud and long, Philip; I am dying to be in!"

The door is almost immediately opened by a buxom maiden with rosy cheeks and a lenient smile, which alights on the youthful mistress. Eleanor bounds into the hall, and waves a feather boa joyfully over her head.

"Hurrah! *Ancestors*," she cries, saluting the old pictures on the wall with mock courtesy. "Real dead ancestors in wigs, and you *never* told me, Philip!"

She is standing, gazing on them joyfully as the luggage is brought in, pointing with her umbrella at a wrinkled judge.

Her husband smiles, and takes the umbrella from her.

"They have seldom received such admiration," he says gently. "Poor old things, they disfigure the walls sadly with their grim faces."

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"The lady on the left is simpering; and, oh! here is a tiger rug," stumbling over a head on the ground. "I caught my heel on his nose," as Philip prevents her falling by seizing her elbow.

"Show me which is my room. I am longing to see it," she continues, taking two steps at a time in her eager ascent. "Sarah," calling to her maid, "bring those three hat boxes and my cloak, there's a good soul! Come on, Philip, I'll race you to the top."

He feels as if he is playing with a child, as he rushes over the house after Eleanor. The day of the school treat returns to his mind, he fancies he sees her still, running through the long grass.

"Everything is beautiful," she gasps, clasping her hands. "There's a room to be frivolous and lazy in, a study for book learning (I'm going to read no end) and, oh! if you want to sing——"

She draws a deep breath at the remembrance of the grand piano in the drawing-room. "It is ever so much bigger than the one at the vicarage, which was always out of tune. I'll get my cousin Joe to send me a list of songs, and we will buy a harmonium, too, Philip. I can play the harmonium splendidly."

"I am glad you are pleased, Eleanor," he replies, kissing her upturned face.

"And now, I am going to dress, for I feel horrible after my journey. May I ring for Sarah?"

"Of course. What a question! Do exactly as you like with your own servants."

She finds Sarah in her room busily unpacking.

"Oh! there you are," cries Eleanor. "I forgot I had given you my keys. It is such a blessing to be able to talk in English, that foreign stuff was awful, I could not speak a word! Yes, I will wear my lovely pink tea-gown—did you ever see anything so pretty, Sarah? I must make you put it on some day, just to show how it looks on another person. You are a bit stouter than I am though, but perhaps you could pull in——"

And so Eleanor rattles on, just as if Sarah were one of the farm-servants at home, and she the same unaffected light-hearted Miss Grebby.

Eleanor walks up and down before the glass.

"Are you happy, Eleanor?"

"Do you come from the country, Sarah?" she asks at last.

"Yes, ma'am. My father's a grocer, and mother keeps house for the doctor's children in our next village."

"Then they don't live together?"

"No, ma'am, it's father's temper. We ~~neze~~ of us can't live at home, he is that hasty! It ain't safe, ma'am, it ain't really!"

"How dreadful," sighs Eleanor. "Doesn't it frighten you?"

"Lor! yes, ma'am. I have seen him grow purple round the eyes, and crimson in the cheeks, and throw a whole sack of flour through the window."

Eleanor receives the information with an expressive "Oh!" as she shakes down her hair, and tells Sarah to brush it.

"How many servants have I got?" gazing at her face in the mirror contentedly.

"Three, ma'am. There's me, and Judith, and cook."

"Do you like Richmond?"

"Well enough, ma'am, thank you, but Judith would have rather been in London, and cook has always set her face against the suburbs."

"Then why did they come?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, the gentleman engaged them, and he seemed that put about they hadn't the heart to refuse."

"Good gracious! whatever is that noise?"

"The dinner gong. Judith is very strong in the arms, and she do make it sound, ma'am!"

"Light a few more candles; I want to have a good look at myself."

His wife Eleanor walks up and down before the glass, with spasmodic gasps of satisfaction, till Philip comes to the door to see if she is ready.

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Eleanor is brimming over with conversation during the evening meal; she has something to say about everything, and her ideas seem to expand over each fresh course. At the soup she wants a pony cart, but over the fish decides on a brougham and Victoria. The *entrée* introduces a pair of prancing chestnuts, and Philip is quite afraid that the arrival of the meat will suggest powdered footmen in silk stockings.

"You see, dear," he explained at dessert, when Sarah and Judith have left the room, "I have a very comfortable income to live in a fairly luxurious style without undue extravagance. We can easily keep one horse and man, which I have waited to choose with you."

"I see," replies Eleanor, peeling a banana. There is a pause, then she looks up and repeats uncertainly: "I see, Philip."

"You will try and make a good little housekeeper and manage everything splendidly. I often think of you, Eleanor, in your peaceful domesticity at Copthorne. How quiet it was, and——"

"How *dull!*" (sighing).

It all comes back with a rush—the pewter dinner service, and spotless parlour, smelling of lavender and soap, the cackle of hens and lowing of cows. Eleanor pushes aside the dish of bananas, "Let us go out in the moonlight," she says. "It is lovely in the garden, and you can smoke. Let me light your cigar," striking a match on the sole of her velvet slipper, and narrowly escaping burning her pink silk train.

"You must not do that, dear, it is dangerous," remonstrates Philip.

"Oh, no! not if you put up your foot *so*," illustrating her meaning by striking another. "What is that pretty yellow stuff you are drinking?"

"Chartreuse."

Eleanor kneels down by his side and sips out of his glass. "What queer tasting stuff; not half as nice as elderberry wine!"

"Don't you like it?"

"No; it's almost as nasty as the cowslip tea I used to make. But do come for a stroll, I like wandering about in this long silk gown, it feels so grand."

"Master's been home an hour."

"What myriads of stars!" exclaims Philip, who is well versed in astronomy. "Don't they make you feel like a mere atom, Eleanor, when you think they are all worlds?"

"No, I never bother my head about stars. I like moonlight, it's so pretty, and the moonbeams look ghostly and fairylike. But isn't it cold in the garden? I only just realise that summer is over, and what an eventful summer it has been for me! The other girls at Copthorne were mad with jealousy at my wedding. They all want to marry gentlemen now, and come to London. Do you remember the schoolchildren, Philip? How they scattered flowers and crowded round to kiss me. I gave them my wedding cake (or rather what was left of it) when we went, and the three cheers for 'Teacher,' is quite the nicest recollection." Eleanor's passionate love for children pleases her husband, it shows that her nature is good. He puts his arm lovingly round her as they return to the house.

"Are you happy, Eleanor?" he whispers. A soft brightness creeps into her eyes.

"Yes, Philip, there isn't a lighter heart in Richmond!"

* * * * * *

"Oh! dear, more cards! I returned the doctors' wives visits yesterday, three of them, Philip—each intent on her husband's business, I suppose. Two were at home, and I looked so aggravatingly healthy. I could not think what to talk about, having never done that sort of thing before. The first mercifully had a dog, which I admired for a quarter of an hour, the second showed me her pigeons. I knew all about *them*."

Philip looked at the latest cards which Eleanor handed him.

"Mrs. Mounteagle," he read, "why she is the lady next door. I don't want you to know her, Eleanor. She has not the best of names in Richmond; this place teems with scandal! I am acquainted with half-a-dozen people who positively cram it down your throat whenever you are unfortunate enough to meet them."

"And what have they against Mrs. Mounteagle?"

"Well, my dear, nothing alarmingly serious, only she is rather a fast widow, and not a nice companion for you. She has a queer set at her house, and is almost too 'up-to-date' even for Richmond society."

"But since she has called, Philip, and we live next door, what am I to do?"

"It is awkward, certainly. I should leave cards, and not ask if she is in. That is about the best hint if you don't desire her acquaintance."

"She will think me so horrid," sighs Eleanor, "but I will do as you wish."

The following afternoon Eleanor, card-case in hand, rings at Mrs. Mounteagle's, prepared to carry out her husband's suggestion.

A soft voice singing in the garden arrests her attention. It is the sweetest sound Eleanor has ever heard. Light footsteps crunch the gravel, and a slim, dark woman approaches with slumbrous eyes, which look at the visitor dreamily. A smile, like a fitful flame, flickers over Mrs. Mounteagle's face, suddenly bursting into a bright expression of ill-concealed amusement at Eleanor's nervous demeanour.

"Mrs. Roche," she exclaims, holding out a welcoming hand. "You see, being such near neighbours, I know you already by sight. I am sure if you are only just married

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you must find first calls most boring and tedious. But I am very glad you selected this afternoon to return mine, for I am simply pining to talk to someone. The dead leaves and general decay out here gives one the blues. Come in, and help me to appreciate my first fire."

Eleanor has utterly forgotten her husband's wishes, till she finds herself in a softly-cushioned rocking chair, with her feet on Mrs. Mounteagle's brightly-polished fender. Then she remembers—and ignores.

Never has any woman fascinated her as the lovely widow she is asked not to know. What sparkling conversation! and, oh, what a dainty tea service and piping hot cakes the footman places between them as they talk.

The room is far prettier than Eleanor's boudoir which she has hitherto considered such a dream of beauty. More than once Mrs. Roche suggests going, but the widow intreats her to remain.

"It is so delightful to have you!" she declares, with exuberant cordiality. "I have done nothing all the afternoon but lie on this sofa and yawn over a novel. I could have written it better myself, and that foolish librarian at Mudie's recommended it. I drive to town nearly every afternoon—there is always something to buy or something to see. Are you fond of London, Mrs. Roche?"

"I hardly know, I have been there so little. I lived in the country before my marriage, and was positively buried."

"It is a mercy then that Mr. Roche found you, and dug you up."

"Yes. I like married life much better."

"Spinsterhood is a mistake," retorts Mrs. Mounteagle. "If you have the misfortune to be thrown back upon yourself—widowed in your prime—take my advice and marry again. We poor weak little women were not made to take care of ourselves. We want a stronger arm to lean on—someone who will think for us, anticipate our every wish, load us with all the good things of this earth, and kiss us to sleep when we die!"

Eleanor listens admiringly to this superior mind.

"I shall re-marry," continues Mrs. Mounteagle, "but not immediately. I am practically 'growing my husband.' He is still young in years, though old in frivolity, or vice, whichever you like to call it. He must have his fling before he settles down, or I shall only be binding a burden on my shoulders."

Eleanor attends with deepening interest.

"I married very young," continues Mrs. Mounteagle, "and my husband was nearly eighty. Yes," noting her visitor's surprise, "rather a difference in our ages, wasn't there?

"Love, my dear Mrs. Roche, is a science; you can learn it with careful study, and make it always accommodating, pleasant, and never vulgarly effusive. Do not imagine that the first bloom of youth gleans all the peaches, leaving only apples for after years. A clever woman seldom grows old. She erases Time with the same nimble fingers with which she creates her boudoir, and makes it appear part of her being. You admire my sanctum, and small wonder. It has cost me sleepless nights as long as the furniture bills. I invented it. These chairs for instance were not arranged, they *occurred*. The minutest detail has positively been prayed over. Look at my quaint treasures! If other hands had placed them they might appear ignoble, debased. You see the curve of this pillowed couch, the tint of the curtains, it is *Art* Mrs. Roche, Art with a big *A*."

"I am dreadfully envious," cries Eleanor, "there is no artistic genius in me."

"It must be born in the blood, but if you like I will 'compose' you a room. It shall be like a melody (if you can grasp the comparison)—subtle, entrancing."

"You are *wonderful!*" says Eleanor solemnly.

The light is fading fast, only the soft glow of the fire filters through the gloom.

"It is all so like a fairy palace, and you are the fairy, Mrs. Mounteagle."

"Then, in the guise of a mysterious gnome, let me give you a word of warning. You are a stranger in Richmond, pray take care not to get into a clique. They are so numerous and unhealthy, so full of civil wars and petty strife, that existence becomes poisoned, and all the romance of life is swept aside, seared, wasted!"

"Thank you," replies Eleanor, rising reluctantly and giving Mrs. Mounteagle both her hands. "How good you have been to me to-day!"

"I hope we shall see a great deal of each other," answers the widow softly, "and be very great friends."

"It shan't be my fault if we are not," responds Mrs. Roche.

They part.

"Oh, ma'am! Master's been home an hour, and he's frightened to death about you."

Thus Sarah greets her on her return.

(To be continued.)

IF ANY READER OF

SHORT STORIES

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Pearson's Magazine.

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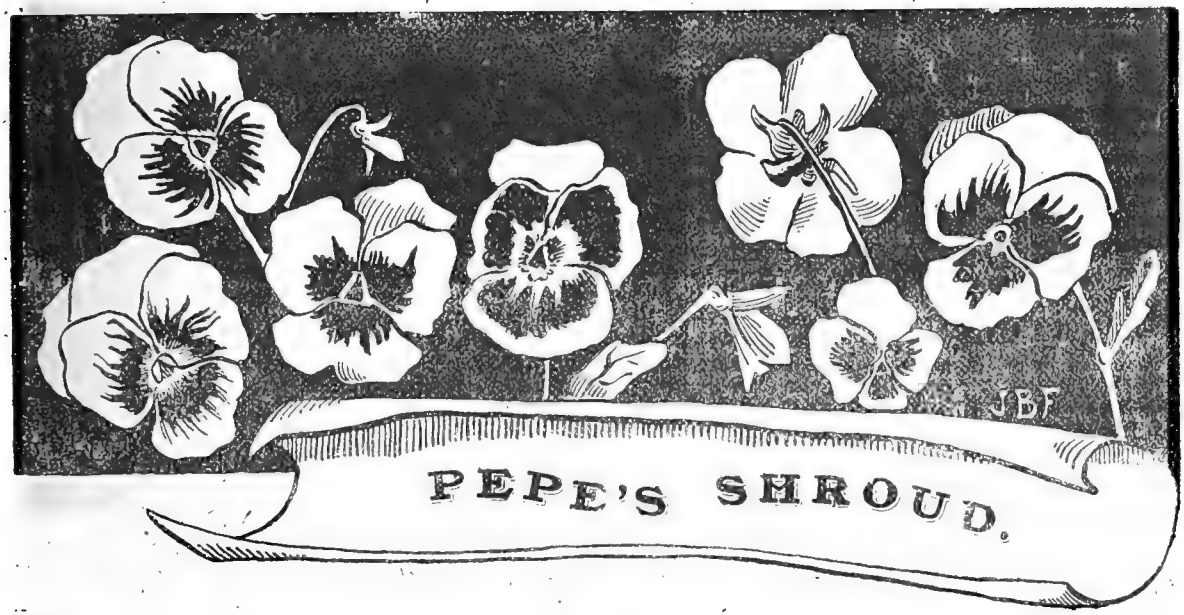

PEPE MURHUA was, perhaps, the most popular young man in San Felipe. He was a singularly cheery lad, and to his unfailing good spirits, no doubt, owed much of his popularity, rather than to his many qualities of greater sterling worth. But the trait which excited most interest among his compeers of his own age and sex was his dauntless, daring courage. None so reckless as Pepe when the amateurs took the bullring for some *function* whose funds were devoted to charitable or patriotic purposes; none pushed his horse to such strenuous efforts nor clung so persistently to the game at the *coleadero*, when the young bloods of the community pitted their strength one against another in "tailing the bull."

And brave he was, too, in emergencies in which the soul is less highly keyed to heroism than in such stimulating phases of dash and enthusiasm. Facing calmly and in cold blood men maddened by drink or passion, or else turning a bold, defiant front to the lawless gentry infesting, in his day, the district, Pepe demonstrated ever his self-possession and courageous spirit.

A group of Pepe's friends had had his attributes under discussion, one miserable Sunday afternoon, when the sudden intermittent gusts of rain, and the dusty wind had driven them to shelter from the rather bleak alameda, where to day no carriages dashed under the garrulous cottonwoods, nor demure, dark-eyed maidens paced the gravelled ways, or perched, like gay birds, upon the massive stucco benches. The coterie had betaken themselves to the house of Don Enrique Soto, at the instance of Federico, his son, who sat brimming their glasses with the cordial wine of Parras —to the disdain, be it admitted, of divers supercilious spirits, who would have been vastly better contented with any poor, thin liquor, so only that it should bear a foreign label.

"I tell you, comrades all," cried Pablo Nuñez, "this fine fellow, Pepe, gets credit for valour he does not know. In all these feats of strength that he performs, he knows he is at an advantage by virtue of his limber and strong muscles. But the true test of courage will be a case where he is on an equality with others—with all the world. How would he behave during an earthquake, when his tremendous strength would avail him nothing? How long would he stand before an intangible shape—a phantom?"

At that a shouted chorus of laughter ascended from the circle of young men.

"*Por Dios!* Pablo, dost thou believe in phantoms? But what ghosts hast thou seen? Come, tell us a tale —a story—a legend. A pretty business this—that Pablo has grown credulous of ghosts—he who was wont to scoff at aught that he could not touch, regarding the doctrines of the church even as the superstitious dreams of ignorant women. Oh, Pepe!" cried the merry crew, deriding as the favourite came to the door, "here is meat for thy mirth! Here is Pablo grown superstitious!"

Pepe smiled when the babbling spirits explained the situation, not failing, either, to mark the point that the question had arisen through Nuñez's doubt of Pepe's valour. But smile although he did, Pepe looked serious, too.

"Remember, mates," he said, "that Pablo is from the Sierra, and in the mountains one grows up more inclined to belief in unearthly things—the very influences of Nature, unchanged by the arts of man, tend that way."

"Eh! Pepe to the defence!"

"Well yes, then," said Pepe, "and I do think, moreover, that deep down in every human heart there lurks belief, of less or greater strength, in the supernatural. Some stake their faith on dreams, and some on signs and tokens. Thou, Corvera, didst shiver and leave off playing *mallila* one night last week because Juan Luna came and looked over thy shoulder with his crossed eyes. How many of you will join me to-morrow in a dinner I will give to twelve? Come, speak up, boys. You shall have the fullest spread the town affords, and French wines all. What! are you bashful?"

No man made exuberant haste to accept Murhua's offer to make one of the thirteen; rather, the young fellows looked abashed and guilty.

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"*Aja*," cried Nuñez. "I told them you'd wear the white plume on some charges. Now, see, Pepe, you rank as the pluckiest fellow in town; will you come to Campo Santo alone to-night?"

"I don't think I am the pluckiest," said Pepe. "There's Juan Carrazco, who faced that mad bull that was charging a crowd in the market place, and Tito Redona, who overcame and tied crazy Sanchez, the butcher, over the dead body of the maniac's son that he had just murdered."

"So you want to dodge the trial by shifting the honours?" said Nuñez tauntingly. "These are all cases where the danger was clear and definite. You will not go to the graveyard?"

"Oh, yes," said Pepe, "I am not given to dodging; I will go. Now, mind you, I am afraid. Yes, comrades, it is true. The unknown is always the thing fullest of horrors, and I find an awful terror in the thought that, as a bare *possibility*, even, somewhat that is gruesome and fearful might befal. But, to my mind, the truest courage lies, not in our reckless, foolhardy exploits, but in fearing a thing and facing it all the same. Come, what do you wish me to do?"

"Let us go now to Campo Santo, and see what shall be the test," and at the word they trooped out and up the street to the dreary graveyard, facing on a forlorn empty square above the alameda, a spot so desolate and forbidding that its mere contemplation would make world-weary humanity willing to cling to life rather than face the destiny of lying in such repellent confines. Death, the Reaper, had garnered ample harvests at San Felipe; his granary was full to overflowing.

The long, whitewashed façade was topped by a cross above the great portal of the *zaguan*, inexplicably wide, since no carriage nor beast of burden ever crosses the threshold. In the long, narrow vestibule, or porch, a chapel was arranged, where, night and day, a lamp burnt before a pictured Holy Family, and its flame threw uncanny reflections upon a row of gleaming ashen-white skulls ranged below.

Passing through this species of *atrium*, the young men, sobered by their surroundings, entered the city of the dead. The graves lay thick as grass-blades, literally overlapping, and almost without exception facing westward. No shrubs, no flowers, or trees enlivened the scene; only the *débris* of dried bouquets from the annual decoration on All Souls' Day, which had fallen a fortnight previous, and here and there a harsh, glaring wreath of yellow and black immortelles. Some of the monuments were stately and handsome, but the majority were flat, low-lying stones, carved with no particular skill or taste, and often with defective orthography. Some of the humbler sort were built of masonry, and painted in crudest, vividest tones of blue or green, picked out with weather-tarnished gilding.

A fair proportion of the monuments bore the letters "D.P.," which indicated the right of the tenants to slumber there undisturbed in perpetuity, instead of suffering exhumation like the less-favoured, whose mouldering bones, at the end of four of five years, would be unearthed and thrown into the common receptacle of the *huescario*.

So depressing was the place, that the visitors, as with one accord, and an instinct of self-defence, lighted fresh cigarettes, and puffed vigorously, until they created a cloud of fragrant blue smoke to mingle with the murky atmosphere. They picked their way with what reverence of tread they might to a section of the northern wall, where the plaster was crumbling away from the adobes, while here and there in the scarred expanse were tablets bearing, besides name and date, the legend, "Slain by the Savage," in mournful suggestion of the days, not so long gone by, when the Indians had been wont to swoop in fierce raids into the city's very streets.

Then Nuñez, still acting as spokesman, turned to Pepe.

"Wilt thou come here at midnight and drive a nail into this wall?"

"I will do it," answered Pepe, "but with reluctance, as you know."

Then, after the inevitable chatter and chaff, the crowd lounged homeward.

It was perhaps ten o'clock when they reassembled at Pablo Nuñez's office, deeming it indiscreet to start such undertaking from the *salon de billar* or any more public point. Pepe looked a little pale and eerie, but nevertheless came gallantly forward. At the last, Clemente Allande, Pepe's bosom friend, tried to dissuade him from the enterprise.

"'Tis a rash and useless thing, *hombre*. Give it up. If aught were to be gained by the going, *vaya!* But to gratify the jealous malice of an envious soul like Pablo, why shouldst thou risk thy life? For at night the exhalations from the graves are more than ever noxious, and thou mayest get typhus or heaven knows what from breathing them."

The plea was potent with Pepe, who had all the usual horror which Mexicans feel for the air of night, never stirring abroad after dusk without muffling his mouth and nostrils in the folds of a silken handkerchief, through which he breathed. "But—I cannot recede now," he said; "cease to dissuade me, Clemente. It may be that the example will be salutary. Seeing that I undertake, for the sake of reason and courage, a thing I dislike and fear, the boys may perhaps be impelled to act with less absolute obedience to their own preferences. We Mexicans of the younger generation are a selfish lot. Give me the hammer," he added, turning back to the others, as he threw the point of his cloak over his shoulder.

This wrap of Pepe's was one of his whims—an affectation, said the malicious. But it was not that. The intense patriotism of the young fellow made him cling to the long Spanish cape of his forefathers—surely the most graceful garment a man can wear—while his comrades disported themselves in overcoats or ulsters of the latest French or English cut.

Throwing, then, over his shoulder one long end of his *capa*, and tucking under its drooping folds the hammer and the big clumsy spike, Pepe stepped away in the darkness, up the gloomy street between the low houses, whose dark, forbidding façades gave no promise of the kindly hospitality to be found within.

"He is gone," said Clemente Allande, re-entering the house. "I saw him turn the corner of the 'Green Devil.'"

"You should not have watched him out of sight," said one of the young men; "that brings evil fortune."

"Now, croak, you!" snapped Clemente viciously, in the stress of his nervous foreboding, and went out to stand alone in the chilled *patio*, more and more deploring Pepe's undertaking. "And I might have prevented it if I had not been a fool," he muttered. "What easier than to have sent a hint to the *Jefatura*, and the prefect would have so moved that the guard of the graveyard would have missed his stolen key and watch

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would have been kept. Better that Pepe should pay a *multa*, or even take a turn in the lock-up, rather than get diphtheria or typhus in the miasmas among the graves!" Then the others came out laughing, and dragged him to the card-table, where still he would not play, but sat glowering at the game.

An hour passed by, another, and Allande could bear it no longer, but sprang to his feet with an oath of disturbance.

"Two hours and Pepe not here! Some evil has assailed him! We must go to his relief."

"And find him snugly in bed," sneered Pablo Nuñez; "he has been home an hour, or—*quien sabe?*—perhaps he was not so scrupulous as to go to the graveyard at all!"

"It does not particularly become you, Nuñez, to sneer and throw aspersions on Pepe's courage, when it is at your instigation he has gone into this absurd and useless adventure. It might be interesting to seek a cause for your pique against him!"

"One need not go far for that," murmured another of the young men; "only down to the corner of Guadalupe, where Aurelia Miramontez lives."

"At all events," said Clemente, "I shall go to Pepe. You who will may come. However, I have no faith in ghosts, and I can go alone."

But the crowd were fairly shamed by Allande's spirit, and moved by self-reproach and also, no doubt, by curiosity, they trooped out with him, barring only Nuñez, who slunk away to his bed. The graveyard paths were dismal in their stark bareness, that left the palpable darkness unrelieved, and pressing like material substance on the pilgrims.

The leader stopped short as he rounded a tall and massive monument that concealed the particular space of wall where their quest lay. Something undoubtedly was there, a denser concrete shape against the formless blackness of the night, and the shadows from the wall. Something, too, in human semblance, and in the uncertain light shed by the lantern's flame, flickering and waving in the riotous gale, it seemed to struggle and writhe, as if in mortal throes, or else in the strain of combat. Clemente dashed forward with one wild cry.

"Pepe! oh, Pepe! To the rescue."

He reached the spot, and but one figure was there; bowing and swaying, bending, and reeling in fantastic movement, as if wrestling with its own shadow, projected in grotesque, unearthly proportions upon the wall. Clemente threw his arms about the other's waist, and strove to restrain and drag him aside. A passive and inert but powerful resistance was the result. By this time the others had gathered round, and one of them threw the lantern's rays full on Pepe Murhua's face. Then a cry of fear and horror went up from all throats, so ghastly was that pallid countenance, set in the rigid lines of mortal agony and despair.

"Will you not help to free him?" cried Clemente. "Are you all paralysed? Come! see what holds him, so I can lay him down. I think he is grasping something on the wall."

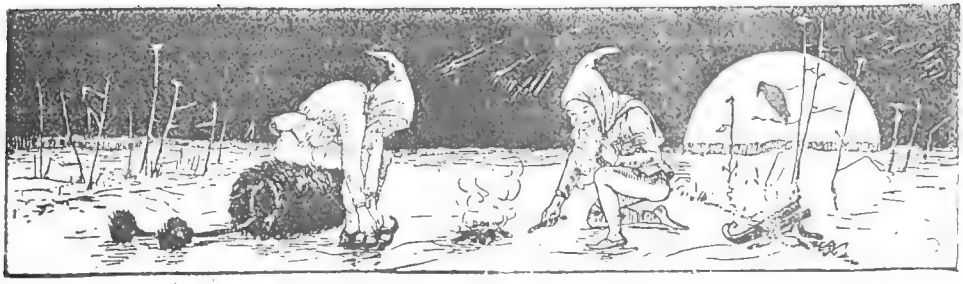
But none of the panic-stricken crew would move, and Clemente himself, still supporting the other, sought to reach along the rigid arms, to detach them from their hold. Both arms hung free; one stiffened hand still held the heavy hammer. Then, with a sudden light breaking on his mind, the faithful Clemente caught at the folds of the ample Spanish cape, flapping and waving airily in the wind, and tried to tear them away from the form of his friend. The resistance which he encountered confirmed his belief, that had taken shape tardily, thanks to the dim and shifting, uneven light.

With a few words of explanation which deprived the incident of its supernatural aspect, he rallied his stiffened companions, prompt enough to act where only material forces were concerned. The nature of the occurrence was plain. Blown by the fitful wind, the folds of Pepe's cloak had been pierced by the heavy spike, whose broad, flat head had effectually held the strong cloth and pinned the young man to the wall. Alone there in the night with such awesome circumstances of time and place, the conditions had unbalanced his judgment when he had seemed to find himself in the grasp of something, unseen, unheard.

Nor had the poor lad succumbed to fear alone. The family physician of the Murhuas had long ago diagnosed a weakness of the heart, brought on or aggravated by Pepe's prowess in field sports, and any excess of mental or spiritual emotion must have resulted fatally. The knowledge of his condition had been kept from Pepe with a view to averting the fate that enlightenment might have spared him.

He was buried near the spot where death had met him, but his name is not forgotten. The graceful fashion of the Spanish cloak is coming into favour in Mexico, but never can be found a youth of San Felipe who will don the garment that is known as "the shroud of Pepe Murhua."

Y. H. Addis.



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TAKING HIM DOWN.

"NOW, Miss—er—er Miss——"

"Fosdick."

"Thanks very much. Now, Miss Fosdick, in commencing your work as a typewriter for the firm of Poplin and Son, it is necessary for me to instruct you as to your duties. I have charge of the house's correspondence—entire charge. My name, Miss Fosdick, is Hipple."

"Yes, Mr. Hipple," the girl meekly replied.

"In the first place," Mr. Hipple went on, leaning back in his chair so as to expand his chest to its utmost capacity, and twisting the ends of his moustache with both hands as he spoke, "in the first place I always insist on my typewriter taking me down *verbatim et literatim*. I suppose you know what that means. It's Latin,' he added condescendingly.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Miss Fosdick, I have had the house's correspondence in my hands for several years, and both Messrs. Poplin have come to rely implicitly upon me. Indeed, I do not really see how this department could move along without me."

The girl's grey eyes looked at the indispensable clerk with an amused twinkle.

"I think I can say, Miss Fosdick," the young man proceeded, as he settled more comfortably in his chair, "and I think I can say it without the slightest egotism or desire to boast, that I have made the letters of Poplin and Son famous throughout the business world as models of English composition and ornate diction."

The clerk watched the countenance of his new assistant closely, to note the impression of his words.

Miss Fosdick nodded understandingly and smiled. It was a sweet smile, for she could not smile any other sort had she tried.

"Those are the reasons why I always insist on absolute accuracy on the part of my typewriter. I do not permit even the alteration of a single word or any other change whatever. I trust you comprehend me clearly."

"Quite so, Mr. Hipple."

"Then we will begin."

Mabel Fosdick's first day's work was perfectly satisfactory to the hypercritical correspondence clerk. He found himself taken down with unvarying accuracy. In the transcribed letters the words were spelt all correctly. She never struck the wrong character on her machine—a fault so common among typewriters, and one which sometimes helped to make type-written communications resemble Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Thanks to Miss Fosdick's skill, Mr. Hipple's specimens of ornate English composition went forth into the business world more faultlessly than ever, and aided in making smooth the rough places of commercial epistolary communication.

The firm of Poplin and Son had been served by a masculine typewriter, but the style of the correspondence clerk had become too oppressive for him, and he had resigned. This was exactly what Mr. Hipple wished, for he longed for a typewriter with laughing eyes and golden hair upon whom to lavish the flowers of language—such a being as he had read about in the funny papers. At last he had found one to suit him, after much examination of applicants, in the person of Miss Fosdick.

Everything went on with apparent smoothness for about a month. The members of the firm noted with approval the modest demeanour of their new typewriter, and the other male clerks of the establishment envied Hipple his pleasant duties.

One day the elder Mr. Poplin sent for Miss Fosdick to come to his private office.

"Sit down, please," he said, when she arrived; "I have here a letter from my friend Mr. Shaw, of Shaw and King, who says that a communication from this firm contains much irrelevant matter."

Poplin looked over his glasses at Miss Fosdick, and found her blushing, with eyes cast down. He asked not unkindly:

"Did you write a letter to that firm lately?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you know its character?"

"Yes, sir."

"What have you to say about it?"

"I wrote it down just as Mr. Hipple dictated it, sir."

"So I supposed, after reading it; but is it not rather unusual to insert in letters extraneous remarks made during dictation?"

"He has always insisted on being taken down *verbatim et literatim*, sir," the pretty typewriter went on, with some confusion; "and, really, sir, Mr. Hipple has annoyed me so much with his attention, and has refused to desist, that I felt I must do something to crush him. I'm sorry I took the method I did—I oughtn't to—oh, dear, what shall I do?"

Miss Fosdick put her dainty cambric handkerchief up to her eyes, and her speech dissolved in tears.

"There! there! my dear girl, don't cry," said Mr. Poplin soothingly.

He took her hand to assist in the comforting operation and placed her head on his fatherly shoulder. He was not too old to make mental note of how long her lashes lay on her rosy cheeks, and how dewdrops of tears oozed through them.

"What am I doing?" Mabel exclaimed, as she bethought herself of the picture she and Mr. Poplin would present if anyone should come into the office, and she promptly raised her head.

"You did just right," said Mr. Poplin, referring to her treatment of Mr. Hipple. "The presumptuous rascal! Never mind, little girl—er—Miss Fosdick I'll settle with Mr. Hipple myself. In the meantime you may take a couple of days off. Go home straight away, and I'll see that he annoys you no more."

After the fair typewriter had put on her things and

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gone home, Mr. Hipple was called into the office, and Mr. Poplin asked him:

"Are you in the habit of reading and signing the firm's letters after the typewriter has taken them from your dictation, and transcribed them, Mr. Hipple?"

When Mr. Poplin took the extra time necessary to use the prefix "Mister," in addressing one of his clerks, it was an indication that the subject of the interview was of more than ordinary importance. It was with some perturbation, therefore, that Mr. Hipple replied:

"Well, sir, I used to, but I found Miss Fosdick so scrupulously exact that I lately have permitted her to sign letters dictated to her without my reading them. She takes me down word for word, sir, so I feel that it isn't necessary for me to read the letters over."

"The reason why I asked you that question is this: I received a note from Mr. Shaw this morning—of Shaw and King, you know—in which he asks an explanation of a letter he had just received from this house. Perhaps you can give the needed explanation after I have read you the letter. This is it:

"GENTLEMEN,—Your favour of Monday was received in due course. Got that down, sweetheart? In reply, we would say—I'd like a sweet kiss from those ruby lips—say that the goods you mention—you charming creature, why are you so cold to me?—mention were shipped yesterday morning. Your birdlike voice thrills me through and through! Why do you never smile on your adorer? Hoping that they have arrived in good condition—give me one kiss, Mabel, darling, won't you?—and that they gave perfect satisfaction—got that down, little beauty—we beg to remain, yours very truly—one kiss now, I insist. What are you struggling for?

"Your obedient servants,
"POPLIN AND SONS."

Hipple turned alternately red and white while his employer read this letter in icy tones, and said nothing when it was concluded. The occasion did not seem to be one for the display of ornate English composition.

After a painful pause the senior member of the firm went on:

"Mr. Hipple, I think I'll attend to the correspondence of this firm hereafter myself, and what love-making it is necessary to do to the typewriter I will also look after. The cashier will give you your salary to date. Good morning, sir."

"The idea!" exclaimed Mr. Poplin to his son, the junior member, half-an-hour later, when he had laid the whole matter before him. "The idea that a womanly and modest girl like Miss Fosdick should be so grossly mistreated in my establishment exasperates me. She's pretty and sweet, and altogether admirable."

"I rather admire Hipple's taste," replied the son.

"Oh, you do," exclaimed the father. "Then I suppose I have done wrong in discharging the scamp, even when he knew his attentions were distasteful to the girl?"

"No, father, you did quite right. Of course it would not do for that sort of thing to continue."

"Of course it wouldn't. It would be persecution of as sweet a girl as I know."

"Why, you are not in love with her yourself, are you, father?"

"I, a widower of fifteen years' standing? The idea! Can't an elderly man defend a helpless young woman without such an imputation as that?"

"Oh, certainly."

Then the conversation was dropped.

Old Mr. Poplin was in love with Miss Fosdick, nevertheless, and he resolved to ask her to be his son's step-mother on the first opportunity when she should report for duty.

Miss Fodsick returned to her duties at the appointed time, and proceeded straight to the private office. The elder Mr. Poplin was alone.

"Good morning, Mr. Poplin," said Miss Fosdick, with her sweetest smile.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" Mr. Poplin replied, raising his eyes above his newspaper; "sit down, Miss Fosdick, please. Before you take the lid off your typewriter, I have something—er—important. I have been thinking of you almost constantly since you went away two days ago, and I wanted to—er—ask you——"

"One moment, please, Mr. Poplin," Miss Fosdick interrupted him to say, "you must pardon me, but I have not come back to work."

"Eh? What's that?"

"No, sir. Fact is—I—that is—your son, sir, has done me the honour to—to—propose, and—and——"

"The sly rascal," ejaculated Poplin, not giving her a chance to finish. "Well, I suppose I'll have to be a father to you, and I will say that I am extremely proud of my new daughter."

Then he thought, "I wonder if she really suspected what I was going to say?" H. L. C.

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MADAME ✣ CAPRICE.

Translated from the French of Gilbert Dore.

"DING! Dong!" Maurice Marsy laid down his palette and ran to the door, which he softly opened. A flower-decked hat with a rosy face under it appeared in the shadow of the staircase, and Madame Denise Ligneron entered the room with the laugh of a joyous child. As a spattered sparrow dries his feathers after the rain and turns about and plumes himself, his wings vibrating, his neck strained, she smoothed out her crumpled draperies, rustling her silken skirts about her and fluttering her ribbons as she bent before the almost finished picture on the easel.

Maurice had carefully closed the door. He contemplated for a moment the pretty silhouette of the young woman, from the flowers on her hat to the points of her polished shoes, his look enveloping with silent caresses the little piquant, provoking and charming person of Madame Ligneron. The studio was neither large nor elegant. It did not contain any of the rare and expensive collections found in celebrated studios, where the painter receives beautiful women and respectful reporters. Several moulds and casts, some studies without frames, some hangings thrown over easel frames, a classic divan, a few rustic seats besides a large rocking-chair composed the unpretentious furniture of the room.

The master himself, young, with a manner at once energetic and sweet, did not seem, in his working costume, a man of great fortune, but for him the springtime and the sun entered his studio with the lady in mauve.

The studio seemed illuminated about her. An aroma of unknown flowers emanated from her clothing, and before the eyes of the artist troops of cupids danced fantastically round his easel.

Which signifies, speaking without metaphor, that Maurice Marsy was in love.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he asked, approaching the young woman as she stood regarding his picture.

"It is good; it is excellent," she replied. "A little too mystic for my taste, but I congratulate you all the same."

In truth, this Joan of Arc, the peasant listening to the voices in a dream under the light of a silvery moon, did not appeal strongly to Madame Ligneron.

This pretty person, whom her intimate friends called Madame Caprice, infinitely preferred the draper's shop of the Louvre to the art gallery of the same name. Under the aureole of blonde hair and the Parisian toilette she hid a little, mediocre and prosaic soul, without virtues or vices—one of those souls which Nature seems to create by the dozen, without the aid of God or the Devil.

A widow, comfortably rich and very libéral, Madame Caprice had striven to merit her name. She brought together in her *salon* a little circle of adorers, nearly all young, nearly all artists, and all amusing.

Her imperturbable aplomb, her parrot-like memory, and a certain feminine *finesse*, permitted her to give to many people the illusion of an intelligent, delicate, benevolent coquette, who was seductive through her very faults.

One day, when she had regarded

The young man remained standing.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

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Marsy curiously while speaking of the irresistible seduction which talent exercises upon the feminine heart, the good fellow felt a heretofore unknown wish born in his soul, to work and conquer.

"I will be somebody—I will be great—I will be celebrated—she will love me," he thought. And all the winter, at the price of a thousand privations, with beautiful ardour and obstinate courage, he worked on his Joan of Arc.

Now the almost completed work, conceived and executed in love, awaited only the finishing touches. On the moon-bathed meadow-land, the blonde shepherdess, her corsage modestly laced across her breast, listened to the voices of the night. Behind her the recumbent forms of animals were barely visible. A fairylike mystery enveloped the scene, and fell upon the kneeling virgin; a transparent shadow poetised the sleeping village; the heavens seemed starred with legends, and in spite of some incongruities, which perhaps gave the picture a more charming originality, Maurice Marsy might well be content.

"Will you permit me to make a few more finishing touches?" said he to Madame Ligneron, who, with half-closed eyes was feigning the concentrated observation of an old expert.

"It will amuse me to see you work," she said, as she seated herself in an immense armchair.

The young man remained standing, his palette in his hand, putting some light touches on the clothing of Joan of Arc.

"There, isn't that better? See, I have given more importance to the luminous reflection, but there is still a crudeness in the background that must be remedied."

His brush caressed the canvas with a respectful precaution. The fever of creation darkened the grey of his clear frank eyes, and Madame Caprice all at once became aware that this great strapping fellow, simple and credulous though he might be, was not at all disagreeable to look upon.

She knew that this young enthusiast was in love with her. When the day came that he should speak, what an amusement it would be to play with the heart of the great boy. To tease, to irritate, to madden, and then to calm him with a smile. Sport delicious, sport eternal, wherein the pretty little ladies with innocent eyes have excelled from infancy upward.

"There!" said Maurice, "we will rest awhile now," and with one last loving look at his Joan of Arc he came and sat down on a low stool close beside Madame Ligneron, who was half pouting to find herself occupying a second place in his thoughts.

"How good you were to come to-day," he said.

"Was I not? It is so hot to-day, and this early spring weather always fatigues me; but I would not break my promise to come and see your picture. You have a great deal of talent, Monsieur Marsy. You are a great artist."

"A great painter! Oh, no," said he, somewhat troubled by the enormity of her praise; "but after many years and much toil I hope to become great."

He grew animated and related his life to her—his laborious toil, his ambitions, his troubles, his lonely sorrows. He was so unhappy having no one to love him in this world. No one to be proud of him.

"What! Not a father, not a mother, not a sister, not a sweetheart——"

He looked her in the face resolutely: "No one," he said.

"It is perhaps your own fault," she responded, smiling.

"My fault! How so?"

"Have you such a hard heart, or are there no longer any pretty girls in the world—amiable models, for instance, who would find it a pleasure to console you?"

His cheek coloured as he answered quickly: "No, Madame, those of whom you speak do not exist for me; as for my heart"—he lifted his eyes and he saw in her blue orbs an excessive curiosity that rendered them almost tender; as he saw her red mouth, her blonde cheek leaning towards him. The spring sunshine illuminated the window, flooding the studio with joyous radiance. A bouquet of flowers from a corner exhaled a double aroma. The light, the perfume and love mounted to poor Maurice's head.

"My heart, Madame," he murmured, "is no longer mine; you have it—alas! you have it entirely," and he pressed his burning lips feverishly upon the ungloved hand of Madame Denise Ligneron.

He took a step towards her.

The first movement of the woman who receives an unexpected declaration—if there is such a thing as an unexpected declaration—is always surprise and the feigning of a noble indignation. Madame Caprice, who had foreseen, prepared, and even provoked the declaration from Maurice, felt obliged to rise with an air of offended dignity, which was nevertheless belied by the malicious pleasure of her eyes and lips, as she ejaculated:

"Monsieur—Monsieur Marsy, who has given you permission to be so presuming?"

"Ah, Madame, Madame," cried the young man without freeing the hands that he held, "is it necessary that I should put into words at this moment all the respect with which you inspire me? My language, my character, my attitude ought to re-assure you. I love you. For months I have burned to tell you so. Circumstances have determined this avowal, which I cannot regret, because it is so sincere. Madame, you are so good, so kind, so intelligent—will you refuse to listen to me?"

After much hesitation Madame Caprice consented to

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sit down, convinced that her living plaything was ready to give her the amusement of witnessing an exalted emotion, all the more droll because she did not participate in it, and Maurice knelt before her without a suspicion of being ridiculed, and commenced his touching confession.

He loved her so much. She was so pretty, so dainty, so artistic. She had so encouraged him. This picture which had cost him so much toil, he never could have finished but for her. During his hours of discouragement, her dear, blonde image had haunted his studio and given him hope. For her sake, and because of her, he would be great. At her little feet he would lay, like flowers, the successes which he would gather for her, if she would love him a little, ever so little. They would have a beautiful life together of tenderness, of pride, of glory—she proud of his talent, he proud of her beauty.

He was intoxicated with his own words—intoxicated by the touch of this young woman, fresh as a young branch of lilacs, and who smiled so kindly upon him. Meanwhile Madame Caprice was silent with mute, ravished vanity.

Oh, if her friends could see him at this moment. If they could hear the eloquent accents of this beautiful boy kneeling at her feet. What a triumph it would be! This man belonged wholly to her. She had conquered and vanquished him. For her he would be willing to sacrifice everything; for her he would set fire to his studio; he would trample upon his paintings, even upon his Joan of Arc. And a malicious, almost wicked, smile drew up the corners of her pretty mouth at this thought.

"Oh, how good you are," cried Maurice, with an ebullition of joy. "You will permit me to hope, will you not?"

The little woman shrugged her shoulders. "No," she said, "for you do not love me."

"Not love you!" exclaimed the painter in amazement.

"No, you do not love me. You are deceived by your artistic imagination, and because I am not displeasing to look upon—because I am interesting to you, you believe yourself to be possessed by a passion which, I fear, is not sincere. I must reserve my heart for one who will be willing to give me proofs——"

"A proof, a proof," cried Maurice. "What can I do to convince you of my love?"

"You love only your painting, and that is your right; it is the artist's nature to seek women for suggestions in art; for sensation that will benefit them in their work. But I am exacting; I wish to be loved for myself, for myself alone, first of all and before all."

"But I adore you. I am capable of any sacrifice to prove it to you."

"Very well, then," said she, with a light laugh. "suppose to convince me it should be necessary to destroy your picture there?"

"I should destroy it at once."

"One says those things, but one never does them."

"Because a woman like you never demands such a sacrifice."

"The greatness of the sacrifice proves the greatness of the love."

"Then you could exact such a test from me?"

"Would you refuse to give it to me?"

"No."

"Be careful. Suppose I should take you at your word?"

"Madame, you are not speaking seriously?"

"Oh, very well," said she, with a touch of disdain in her voice. "You are like all men; just as I thought."

Maurice grew deadly pale. "You do not believe me?" he asked.

"Prove it, then," she said, pointing to his "Joan of Arc."

Maurice gave a sharp, smothered cry: "Ah, coquette, terrible coquette, and if I do this thing you will love me?"

"Yes, Maurice," she answered slowly.

Behind them on the table lay a Japanese dagger, drawn from its sheath, shining in the sun. The eyes of the young man were fixed upon it in a sort of fascination.

"You would love me?" he repeated.

She was so close to him that he could almost feel the breath of her lips as she sighed: "Yes, Maurice, I would love you."

Then he seized the dagger, and in a violent access of rage he lacerated the canvas of his dear, beautiful, divine "Joan of Arc."

* * * * * * *

"Oh, Maurice, you do love me! I believe you, and I —I—how I love you! and how I am so sorry that I made you do this! Maurice, you are not listening to me!"

He was standing with the dagger in his hand, before the *débris* of his picture. A sudden and instantaneous revulsion of feeling had taken place in him. The physical act of destruction had loosened the high tension of his nerves, cooled his ardour, and killed his love. The artist, touched to his very soul, eclipsed the lover. Oh, why had he committed this irreparable folly; and this woman, this vain, imbecile woman, how had he ever loved her?

With a sudden gesture he took a step towards her as though he would drive the dagger into her heart, then threw it across the studio. Startled and surprised, Madame Ligneron drew back, not recognising the Maurice of old in this sombre, menacing man, who stood regarding her with an expression of sorrow, disdain, and disgust.

He went to the door and opened it wide.

"Go out," he said.

She stood as if rooted to the spot by his impoliteness.

"Go!" he repeated with a fierceness that showed the brutal side of his nature. "You have made me commit a cowardly act, a monstrous folly. Is this the price of your love? Then you may keep it for others, with your smiles and promises. I do not want it. Do you hear me? I detest and despise you."

Madame Ligneron grew white with rage.

"You must be both a fool and a maniac to talk in this manner," she said with a forced smile. "I hope that you do not think the sacrifice of your miserable daub was sufficient to make me love you."

* * * * *

And this is how it happens that my friend Maurice Marsy was not represented at the annual exhibition.

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The Price of Betrayal.

"And what do you say your numbers are?"

"Twenty-two, Excellency, myself included."

The chief of the secret police took the paper handed to him, and silently compared it with one in his desk.

"Bardin, Loubanoff, Sobotin—I was not aware of these last. You have done well, Radovitch, and you will find that the Tsar's Government is not unmindful of those who serve it well. Your recent action will atone for your past errors and merit reward besides."

"My life will not be worth a day's purchase if it is known that it is I who have furnished this information."

"You should have thought of that before joining their society. I see you have something to suggest. What is it?"

"That when the seizure by the police takes place no distinction be made between me and the others."

"Of course you will be apprehended with them."

"And tried?"

"Yes, if you wish it, and condemned too, for that matter. Anything further?"

"And pardoned along with the less guilty of the others, so as to avoid all suspicion?"

"I quite understand you. Rest assured you will have no reason for fear in that respect."

The chief of police smiled to himself as the spy took his departure.

That very evening the police raid took place. Taken as they were by surprise and unconscious of any treachery on the part of one of their number, the little coterie of students, artists, and young doctors found themselves bagged, without a single exception. They indignantly denied the charge of conspiring against the government. But General Garashinin's myrmidons merely shrugged their shoulders deprecatingly, perhaps incredulously.

In a month the trial took place. Radovitch was not called to give evidence, but took his place among the accused.

At length the whole twenty-two were adjudged guilty. Twelve were sentenced to Siberia, but not to the mines, as the clemency of the Tsar provided. It was with a thrill akin to horror that Radovitch heard himself sentenced to death, along with the other nine, though conscious that it only formed part of the arrangement that he himself had suggested to General Garashinin.

"Sentence to Siberia would have served the purpose equally well," he muttered to himself, and, turning to look at his companions, he found himself wondering if his own face was as deadly pale as each of theirs.

"To be shot at the glacis of the fortress at sunrise to-morrow morning," he kept repeating to himself, though assuring himself that the words could have no reference to him, for the Tsar must keep troth even with traitors, or none would be found to serve him in future.

Dostoieffsky and the others calmly accepted their fate, and after a hurried farewell to their more fortunate fellows were conducted to their cells for the last time.

The long night passed, all too quickly for him, for whom the messenger he expected so unaccountably delayed. He had seen General Garashinin in court from day to day, and once a glance of intelligence, he persuaded himself, had passed between them.

At last a faint greyness began to manifest itself through the close bars of his cell. It was light, the herald of a new day, the last for the condemned man. And now Radovitch began to explain, in husky tones, that his conviction was all a blunder. The two warders looked intelligently at each other and pityingly upon the wretched prisoner, but said not a word.

In a few minutes all the ten were assembled in the courtyard of the prison, nine of them calm and collected, for the bitterness of death was already past, one a prey of fear and sickening terror, and evidencing it all too plainly in his trembling limbs and livid countenance. In the hurried good-byes they exchanged with each other, Radovitch came in for more than his share of attention.

"It's all a mistake," mumbled the wretched man. "Where is General Garashinin?"

"He is never present at executions," replied the soldier he addressed. "He issued his final orders last night."

And then a melancholy procession began to move towards the glacis of the fortress prison. A priest led the way, holding aloft a large cross before the eyes of the doomed men who followed in single file, their ordinary dress covered with a long robe of white linen, at once a covering for the living and a shroud for the dead.

At last they reached the place appointed. Five stakes had been driven in the ground near the summit of the long even slope of the rampart. To these they were bound in couples, facing the east, now kindling with the warm flush of the rising sun, whose coming was to be the signal for their death. Ranged in front of them, at a distance of fifteen yards, was a company of soldiers with loaded rifles, whose captain, standing a little way apart, held in his hand a white handkerchief, at whose fall sixty tongues of fire would leap forth and sixty bullets seek the hearts of the unhappy men.

There was still time for the last scene but one in the tragedy before the sun should rise. The cross was held before the lips of each man for a final kiss in turn. Then a dagger was broken over their heads by a soldier detailed from the thousands drawn up to witness the vengeance of the Tsar. At that moment the sun seemed to bound into space, and every heart almost stopped.

But the officer has not let the signal handkerchief drop. Instead the retreat is sounded on a score of bugles, and the troops march off the ground. The kneeling men are informed that the Emperor has been graciously pleased to grant them their lives. They are unbound and, as in a dream, try to realise all that has happened and to congratulate one another ere the last couple has been reached. One of these had fallen forward on his face as far as his bonds permitted. It was Radovitch.

"He has fainted," said the soldier. "Bring me some water, sharp."

"No need to trouble," said the doctor, who had rapidly examined him. "He is dead. The fright has killed him."

It was too true. The chief of the secret police had carried out his promise only too literally. The spy had no longer any reason to fear his betrayed comrades' revenge.

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THE LOVE OF CALIBAN.

THE room of Lady Lucrece was full of cool shadows, though it was midsummer, and the purple-bordered linens at the windows swayed in the hot wind. There were purple-bordered linens, too, on the couch where the Lady Lucrece lay—one cannot do much at noontide in Pisa when it is midsummer. The heavens seemed to hang down near to the languorous earth; a palpitant white heat shimmered on the streets; the lazaroni slept; at the bath-houses the attendants went about in shifts of linen; the shops and the stores were silent; it was too hot even to hate. If one had a vengeance to take he waited till nightfall, when it should be cooler. And the Lady Lucrece, fragrant from her bath, lay on her couch amid the fresh linen, and sprinkled powder on her throat to keep the moisture from gathering there.

As the long day wasted itself in languid hours the lady smiled, although it was not her wont.

"How many hours till moonlight?" she asked of her maid.

"Six and more, gracious mistress," replied the maid drowsily; and she wiped her forehead upon her sleeve.

"Ah," sighed the Lady Lucrece, "bring in Massimiliani."

A moment later a queer, halting step was heard on the tiled floor in the hall outside. The curtains at the door were the green which the sea wears in the morning. They parted and Massimiliani stood between them. Had Nature had her way he would have been tall, but some mysterious force had bent him almost double, and his humped shoulders and heavy head hung always towards the earth. He was not merely grotesque, he was hideous. There are men that Nature has jested with—Massimiliani she had cursed. He made a salutation with his hands—he could bend no lower.

"I am for ever bowing," he said to his mistress. "My grace was so great the first time I had occasion to make a salute to a lady, that I was never allowed to rise."

"Who was the lady?" queried his mistress, shutting her eyes as he stood before her.

"Mother Earth." He looked straight down at the Lady Lucrece.

"I do not want gibes this afternoon," said his mistress. Massimiliani spread out his huge dark hands and smiled.

"Then my gracious lady did not send for me?"

"Send for you? Yes, I sent for you."

"It cannot be. You have forgotten. For what am I but a gibe? It cannot be a question of wisdom, or it would not lie between a woman and a fool. Perhaps it was a matter of grace, and you want me to dance; or a matter of beauty, and you wish me to smile; or a question of sweet sounds, and you wish me to sing."

The Lady Lucrece sat up and put the damp hair back from her brow.

"I had sooner hear a chorus of ravens," she said, but she laughed as she said it. No one minded Massimiliani, and she pulled at the end of his long, hanging sleeve to make him squat upon the floor by her feet, which he did with a mocking gesture.

"Princes have been here before me," said he.

The lady looked haughty, but she was not ill-pleased.

"It does relate to singing," said she.

Massimiliani leapt to his feet and seized some roses that lay at the foot of the couch.

"The flowers!" he cried, and flung them from the casement.

His mistress stared at him in amazement.

"From the Lord Ascanio," she replied mechanically.

"There was a tarantula among them. Are you so good, madam, that your lovers must send you to Heaven?"

"Fool!" cried the lady angrily, "there was no tarantula among the roses."

Massimiliani sat down again upon the floor.

"Go on with your tale," said he, "I am no greater fool than I was before."

The Lady Lucrece sat pondering, with her elbows on her knees, and her flushed cheek in her hands.

"Fool," said the Lady Lucrece, and her breath came faster, "you have not heard, have you——"

"God gave me straight ears, the saints be thanked," the jester sardonically interrupted.

"Night after night, since the summer came, a voice below my window? It always comes when the shadow of the balcony hides his figure."

"That he may not see your face, if you lean out, and so lose his inspiration?" interjected the dwarf. The lady struck him on the ear with her jewelled hand. The blow was light, but the dwarf shivered. "The voice," said he, "what was it like?" The lady fell back again into her old attitude. The flowing sleeves dropped from her arms. The loose strings of pearl with which they were wreathed, tumbled down to her elbows. Massimiliani spread himself flat upon the floor, and bracing his heavy head against his hands, watched her as a tiger does his prey.

"Ah, fool! I think you know I never loved. Men are so little. I could rule them all; I do not want a man that I can rule. But his voice—it sings of war, of great deeds, terrible and grand. And yet, Massimiliani, it sings of love—of love which counts power and money, and name as nothing. It does not sue for love; it demands it as a right. The verses which he sings are no other man's; they are his own, and he weaves them as he sings. He does not mind that I am great, he loves me for my soul, he loves me for my pride, for my will, for my scorn of petty things. He knows me as I am. He is the first living creature who has ever done so. It mounts—this voice—up to my lattice like a vine. It runs through gay melodies like rippling water. It grows as sad as the voice of the night-bird. I weep when it sings of death; I throw up my arms and walk the room, strong as a giant, when it sings of war; and when it sings of love, fool, I bury my face in my arms and blush. All day I lie and dream of it, and in my sleeping dreams at night I hear naught but it. I dream how we shall meet and where. I am sure he must be beautiful."

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A sound from the man at her feet caused her to stop. The fool had rolled on his back in a convulsion of laughter, and the tears trickled down his cheeks.

"Fool!" cried the lady, springing from the couch in anger.

"Mother of God!" exclaimed the dwarf, "will the eternal snows melt and the desert blossom? Will the tower fall? Shall I be straight? Will God take pity? Will my lady love?" He threw his jangling punchinello at her feet, and tore his cap from his head. "Wear them," he cried, "my bauble and my cap! I never cracked so excellent a jest."

"Slave!" (the lady grew pale with rage) "to-morrow you shall see, for I shall find which of my courtiers it is that sings thus, and I will marry him, and none but him."

"None but him, gracious lady? And all these perfumed knights that have been praying to you while moons grew great and faded into sheaths again and waned to darkness, and these that hold a courtly contest for your hand?"

"I will marry him alone who knows my soul, and shows it me in song. I sent for you that you might search him out. I thought you might do me some service."

"Aye, for the scorn of fifteen years, which you have given me?"

"Have you not given me back scorn for scorn?"

"At least to-day I have made you forget we are not equals. You are defending yourself against me, mistress, against your slave!"

"Leave me! To-morrow, mind, at night, when my friends are with me, I shall find who sang those songs, and I will be his wife, and none but wife. You think I cannot love? I have known none but fools, though they were not *all* as ugly as devils. Out of my sight. I do not need your aid." The fool, with his head hanging, and his hot eyes rolling, threw up his hands with a frantic gesture and rushed from the room.

The day passed. Evening came, and, later, the moonlight. Under the balcony the shadows were dark. The Lady Lucrece walked in the chamber where the candles stood dark in their silver sconces, and only the moon lit the white marble which her garments swept. She waited long; the voice did not come. The moon reached the west, and still the lady paced the floor. At length the longed for melody, pure, vaulting, triumphant, burst into a song of victory and love; but ere it had sung a score of words it was choked into silence.

A sound arose to the lady's ears of passionate weeping; there was a discordant jangle of the lute as though a disregardful hand had brushed it heavily, and the night wore on in silence.

The next day no one saw the jester, Massimiliani, nor the Lady Lucrece, till it was night—a festal night—and the stately apartments were ablaze with light. Never had Pisa known such a festival. Liberty reigned in hall and hovel, and the Lady Lucrece was the central figure of the festival. She sat at the end of the hall on a dais. Robes of azure silk fell all about her; jewels looped up her hair, glittered on her arms, clasped her white neck, and shone in the fastening of her slippers. About her were flowers, perfume, light, music, men who were courtly, women who were beautiful. There were marbles, carvings, tapestries, statues, and fountains.

But the deep fire in the eyes of the Lady Lucrece did not catch its inspiration from any of these things. It was midnight when she ordered the music to stop. She had been dancing, and all the sensuous rhythm of the motion seemed impersonated in her. She went back to the dais and stood there, young and fair, in the shadow of the ancient carvings. A look of maidenliness, unwonted in her, spread over her face. She came of tyrants, and the blood of the tyrant was in her; but now she looked as gentle as any maid that ever begged her lover for another kiss.

"I have sworn an oath," said she, "and to-night I must keep it. The people of Pisa have long wished me to take a lord, but I have found none whom I desired. But for many nights someone has sung beneath my window. I do not know the man, but my soul is wedded to the voice, and I will marry him alone who can prove to me to-night that it is his." Her hauteur had returned. She was again the daughter of a line of dukes; she was commanding and not seeing. No one replied or moved. The lady spoke again.

"Surely he need not fear; he may trust me." She waited still; a woman's tremours came back to her. "He must have loved me," she cried, "it was the voice of love. Let me but look on him who sang those songs to me." She held out her arms. The jewels on her bosom rose and fell. She seemed half sinking beneath the tremulous agitation. Suddenly from behind the back of that great chair upon the dais there sprang Massimiliani, the hideous jester.

"It was I," he cried. "It was I!"

A murmur, half wrathful and half jeering, a bubble of laughter, surged up from the company.

"Fool!" cried the lady, "this is no time for jests."

"It was I!" he cried. "It was I!"

"Let us hear your voice, knave!" cried a saucy little fellow of sixteen. He flung a coin towards the fool. Massimiliani seized the coin and flung it in the young noble's face. The bent back that had never straightened seemed almost to straighten now, and a voice full of passionate sadness, yet melodious and thrilling, came out of a form which seemed made to be the covering for only unclean things. It was an existent paradox; an astounding incongruity; the antithesis of facts. And as he sang, a hope leapt into his eyes, and a triumph into his voice. Desire belongs not alone to Adonis; even a Caliban may love.

The lady's head was bowed upon her breast. The song he had chosen was the unfinished one she listened to the night before. The humpback bent forward in hideous importunity, but the lady's face was shaded with her silken scarf. He grew mad with a tumult of wild surmises as to what her mood might be. At length she raised her face and he saw. It was the tyrannical disdain of her race—the unspeakable contempt of a ruler for a presumptuous and menial knave—the mad mortification of an outraged woman and the chaste pique of a maiden.

He saw and comprehended at a glance. He knew it was all over. The song died upon his lips. The swords of the nobles, which amazement had kept in their sheaths, were out. Massimiliani leapt forward towards his mistress, caught her in his arms, kissed her, and as the fierce Italians surged up to him he buried his stiletto in his breast.

So died the last jester of Pisa.

Ella Peattie.

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It was no use, try as I might, I could no longer rest quiet in Calcutta, slaving away in that stuffy office of the Indian Bank, of which I was junior partner.

I had been working hard the whole year without a single day's holiday, and, what with the heat and mental exhaustion, my health began to give way.

The questions of what to do, and where to go, were soon answered in a letter which I received a few days afterwards from my old friend Clifford Harrison of the 2nd Bengal Cavalry.

Clifford and I were old school chums, and had been going up for the army together, when the death of my mother upset all my plans. I went out to India to enter my father's bank, and Harrison went into Sandhurst. Since then I had not seen him, but we frequently interchanged letters.

His last note informed me that he had just obtained a captaincy in the 2nd Bengal, which was stationed about fifty miles from Patna, at a place called Gya, and asked me to be sure and go and stay with him at my earliest convenience.

The shooting round Gya is particularly good, and the country abounds in big game. These inducements were not to be despised, so a week later saw me comfortably settled in the train running from Patna (where I changed) to the cantonment of the gallant 2nd.

Clifford met me at my journey's end, and soon we were bowling along in a high double dog-cart behind a smart pair of greys.

During the first week we made some fairly good bags of game. Then it occurred to us that we might get better sport if we went to Cheelapunghi, a beautiful spot in the midst of the jungle, about ten miles from our bungalow. This being decided upon, we got up early the next morning and were soon spinning along in the direction of the Pandu ruins, which lay on our route. Arriving at a thick wall of jungle we called a halt, and, leaving the cart in charge of a native servant, we dived into the mass of trees and bushes behind our native hunter or shikaree, named Gulap Singh.

Gulap was a man of no mean merit in his own way. For that day he acted as tracker and gun-bearer.

We wasted much time in following the spoor of a panther which had led us a futile chase, as also did the tracks of a tiger. It was in vain that Singh protested at our carelessness in not keeping to his leadership, and it was only when darkness was coming on that we found how foolish we had been.

The sun was now setting fast, and, look where we would, nothing but one mass of tangled jungle met our eyes. "Very much tigers here, sahibs," said Singh. "When night come, all creep out."

"That's most comforting," growled Clifford, "but he's right, by jove, this is the Rajah's big game country!"

"Then the sooner we get out of this the better; I for one don't relish being a meal for tigers," said ..

Taking our heavy bore rifles from Gulap, we started back at a smart pace. Crashing our way through the tall undergrowth we came to an open space in the middle of which a pool of water lay. Instinct made us halt, and, on looking at the reeds which grew under the shadow of a huge rock on our right, we saw a tremendous tigress crouching ready to spring at us.

Petrified with fear I staggered back a few paces and halted. Like one paralysed, I could neither think nor do anything. A low ominous growl, however, brought me to my senses, and then I was steady enough.

I saw a playful cub emerge from the thicket and bound to its mother, then remembering that I was the nearest of the three, I raised my rifle and pulled the trigger. The click of the hammer as it descended was the only noise that broke the stillness of the jungle. The gun was not loaded!

To turn and snatch a rifle from Gulap was the work of a moment, then, raising it to my shoulder, I fired. Perhaps it was the hasty aim, perhaps my hand

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trembled—anyhow, when the smoke passed, there was the cub stretched lifeless beside its mother!

With a roar of rage the tigress launched herself at me—move, I could not; I only remember seeing two blazing eyes and hearing Clifford cry:

"Down! For Heaven's sake lie down!"

Possibly I moved a few inches, or my knees gave way; however, I know the long, active body of the brute struck me sideways into the pool, and as the water closed over me I heard the crack of a rifle.

Crawling out of the mud and slime, I saw Harrison standing near the tigress with the still smoking gun in his hand. The huge beast was quivering in her death agonies; with one superb attempt she staggered to her feet, then, bringing out a tremendous roar of rage, she fell on her side, dead.

"That was a fine shot of yours," I exclaimed.

"Confoundedly lucky," he answered; "I was afraid you were done for! What's become of your rifle?"

I thought that perhaps it had been knocked out of my hands when I fell, so, going down to the pool, I began to grope under water for it. I had been fumbling about for some time, when I was brought smartly to the upright by the noise of some weighty beast pounding over the reeds. Rejoining Clifford as quickly as I could, I heard Gulap, whose face was absolutely livid, gasp:

"The tiger come to avenge his mate and cub, sahib!"

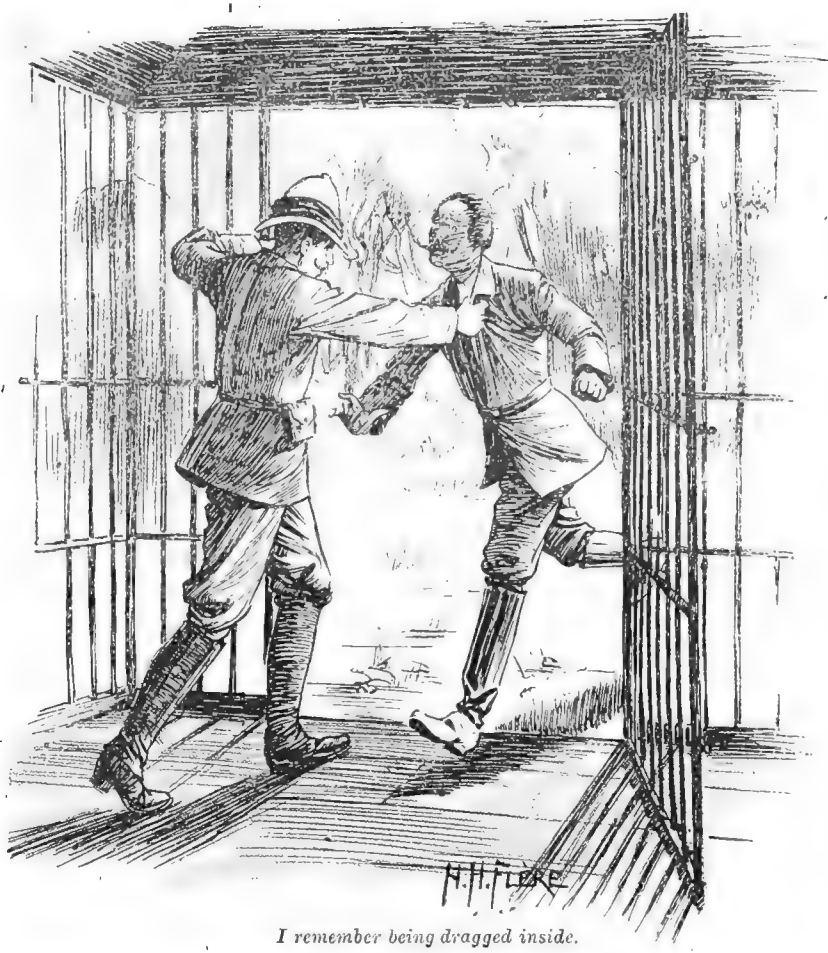
"Quick! your rifle, then! Here, take mine!" exclaimed Clifford.

Giving his gun to the tracker, he was about to take his own when a deafening roar shook the ground, and out bounded the tiger within fifty yards of us. This was too much for Gulap, brave though he was; spinning round on his heels he sped down the path with both rifles in his hand, leaving us unarmed!

"Stop, you scoundrel!" cried Clifford. Singh stayed not an instant.

Another roar determined us. Off we dashed, without once looking back. A howl of grief and rage spurred us on. The light was fading, but on we plunged—on and on. How could we hope to escape with that awful swish, crack, swish, as the agile brute followed our track.

Stumbling, tottering, staggering, on we went till, out of sheer fatigue, I nearly fell. An awful roar awoke the echoes of the jungle almost behind our backs, and just as death was upon us we came to a space cleared in a thicket, wherein stood an iron cage about nine feet square.



I remember being dragged inside.

I remember being dragged inside and hearing the door jerked fast, as with almost a scream of rage the tiger hurled himself against the closed gate, biting and clawing at us till the bars themselves rattled and cracked.

The gate was all rusty and thin from age, and might break at any moment. The tiger seemed to read my thoughts, for, trotting back a few yards, he crouched, and with another of his piercing roars he sprang full at the door. Crash! over spun the cage, and, on looking up, we saw the head and shoulders of the brute struggling and clawing to get at us!

Slowly but surely we watched him work his way towards us. Well could we see that huge paw waving nearer and nearer, and the gleaming teeth snapping just above it. Then I fell to wondering if the tiger would kill me or Clifford first, and whether I should get a good sight of his death, then—bang! the great brute came crashing down between us!

I must have fainted, for when I came to, a crowd of officers, with Clifford in their midst, were standing round me. Then it was that I learnt that Singh had fetched the party to rescue us, and had tracked us to the Rajah's shooting cage just in time to kill the tiger before he had forced his way through the gate.

JOHN FRASER.

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HE, SHE, and IT.

THE curtain had fallen on the second act, and the music had begun again — low, sweet, pathetic. The lights burnt more brightly, and one could see the faces across the house. The hum of voices grew lighter and merrier.

It was a "first night," and the play was a success.

Three people sat in a second tier box. Mother and daughter and daughter's betrothed. The girl was the fair, fragile second self of the handsome lady, who in her own youth must have been a rare beauty. One could guess that the two were tenderly devoted to each other. Every slightest movement or expression of countenance betokened the fullest confidence; the fond smile of the parent, the responsive murmur, of the gentle maiden, the affectionate gesture or whisper one to the other, all spoke of that delightful and cordial understanding between mother and child, which, alas! exists only too rarely. But Lilian Duncan was her mother's only child, and Lilian's tender heart had never been frozen—or even chilled—with coldness from this widow mother.

She was seventeen and her betrothed was thirty-five, more than twice her age. Yet he did not look old or even *blasé* beside her there in the box. His face was smiling and almost innocent in expression (his mouth, to be sure, was hidden beneath a heavy, dark moustache); his eyes were of a placid brown that by lamp or gaslight assumed a melting, indescribable beauty. Apart from these, his chief charm was his voice—low, lingering, persuasive. It was a voice to work its master's will against all obstacles.

As the curtain fell on the second act, he, Herbert Grossmith, leant towards his affianced, and spoke gaily:

"So far so good. I'm glad of it, too, for I know the author. He's a good fellow."

"It is quite strong," said the elder lady softly. "One gets the lesson intended almost from the outset."

"The lesson, mamma," put in Miss Lilian. "What is the lesson? Indeed, I wasn't thinking of anything like lessons; I was only feeling sorry for the poor girl who had been deceived, and——"

"Who is going to be murdered—perhaps in the next act," said Mrs. Duncan. "Isn't that the plot, Herbert? Deceived and murdered?"

But Herbert Grossmith did not at once reply. All in a moment a change had come over him. He was gazing steadfastly across the house at the circle below the opposite corresponding boxes. He appeared so engrossed that Lilian, after regarding him in surprise, reached over and laid her opera-glass upon his knee. As her hand touched his own she started.

"Herbert," she said, "you are not well. Your hand is like ice."

The music ceased, and the tinkle of the bell before the re-rising of the curtain recalled him.

He turned and spoke in an altered tone, and as if he had just drawn a breath of relief.

"I thought I saw someone I used to know. I thought someone I believed dead was over there. It was all imagination."

Then he relapsed into silence, and the play went on. But the words of Lilian's mother, to which he had not replied, were ringing in his ears like the echo of an old, old accusation. "Deceived and murdered!" Had it been all imagination? Or had the dead arisen from the dead? It was gone; the figure that seemed to stand over yonder, and to smile wanly, accusingly up at him seated beside his new love—it had gone! With the ceasing of the music, with the tinkle of the stage-bell, with the going on of the play—it had gone. But would it come again?

He made some faint excuse to his betrothed and her mother, and stole quietly from the box. He went down very softly; and round into the circle where it had walked and sat and wanly smiled. He searched carefully; searched with all his might of gaze and reason. He scrutinised separately each chair—they were all filled. He searched among the people who, not having secured seats, were obliged to stand or promenade. It was not there. He began to feel absolute certainty and relief. It had been all his fancy—an optical illusion Perhaps the play had brought up memories that should

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never rise to darken his life. He breathed more freely; his heart beat normally again; his hands grew warm; he even smiled at his cowardice. But he did not at once return to the box. The act was nearly at an end—a sort of climax was reached. He watched the stage. It was the murder, or the supposed murder scene. The cry of the victim rang out piteously. And soon the curtain had again descended. The lights brightened, and the orchestra played "Under the Daisies."

He looked up at his own box, and a chill more terrible than before shook him from head to foot. It was there, beside Lilian and her mother, yet not seeming to speak with or care for them, seated in the seat that he himself had occupied. It was there, and he was doomed.

He slowly made his way back through the foyer; he knew that he met friends, and that they spoke to him, but he could not reply. He went up into the box. It sat there unknown to Lilian or her mother. They were all unconscious of its presence.

"Why don't you sit down, Herbert?" Lilian asked innocently.

"I am not well," he answered. "I have a chill, I think."

Lilian leant over then as if to place her opera-glass upon the seat he had occupied. He watched her with a kind of horror.

It was there, intangible, yet ever present. He saw it push aside the glass, which fell upon the floor. He stooped quickly, and picked up the repelled object and held it in his hand. He stood more quietly then; the chill upon him did not affect him so unpleasantly as at first. His entire temperature was reduced; the numbness was not wholly disagreeable. As yet it had not turned to face him, but sat gazing down upon the merry throng that filled the house with perfume and laughter and happy babble.

The orchestra soloist was still playing "Under the Daises," when it suddenly turned its countenance upon him. And then he saw the face of a woman, long dead, and the form of the same dead woman, and even the pale, primrose gown she had worn. Her lips moved, but he alone could hear her whisper, "Come!" Her hands beckoned; no other eyes than his might see them. She passed by him through the door of the box, and he could only follow.

He heard Lilian speak his name, "Herbert;" he saw Lilian's mother regarding him wonderingly, and yet he had no word to say. Lilian's fair young face and heavenly eyes faded from his sight—for ever! It was guiding him. The wraith of the woman long dead led him out of the theatre, out into the starry, balmy summer night. It walked beside him now with its shadowy hand upon his arm. They fared rapidly along, street after street, northward out of the city. He did not draw back; he felt no weariness. They left the heart of the city far behind them and came to empty fields at last. In the near distance was a rushing sound of the mighty river hastening seaward.

"At last, at last!" the wraith beside him seemed to whisper. Not vengefully, not in triumph, but rather as with a vast relief. And he found himself answering inaudibly, yet distinctly:

"Well, I am here; at your mercy now."

"As I was at yours," the shadow seemed to sigh. "Do you recall that night? Do you recall——"

He did not hear the rest. A great roaring filled his ears. The scene suddenly altered. The starry summer night was changed to one of fitful moonlight and scurrying clouds—a chilly night in autumn. The place became more lonely. He was back again, back a decade, back in his youth. And in the cold and leaf-strewn roadside lay a woman—dead; a woman in a primrose gown with a mark upon her forehead where an angry hand had struck her down. And he himself was there, fearful, horror-stricken, filled with cowardly hatred—he was there for an instant looking down upon the prostrate form, then turning to flee, fleeing far, far, far away in desperate terror.

Again the scene altered—back to the outskirts of the town and the starry, balmy night. And he went on with It beside him.

"Death is the only expiation; death, death, death!" It seemed to say, as It led him towards the rushing of the mighty river. And he followed obediently. Only once a thought passed through his brain of what now should never be—the thought of Lilian, his fair-haired love. One faint flash of thought brought the sight of her as he had left her, at the side of her mother in the box at the play, the curtain down, the throng of happy people, the light, the perfume, the merry murmur, the music "Under the daisies." That was all. It led him to the steep bank of the river.

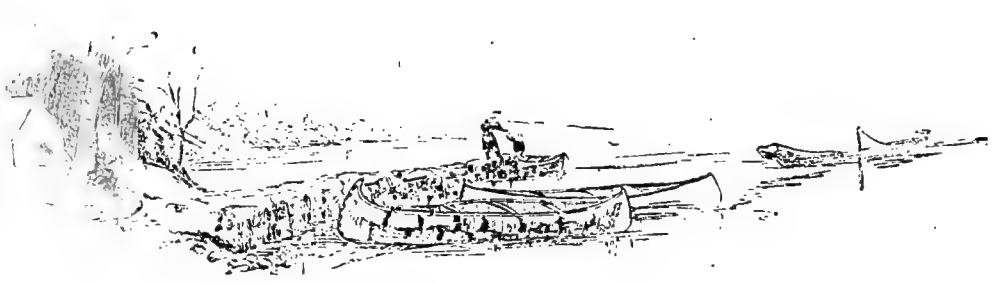
It led him on into the space above the water.

And obediently he followed.

And the mighty waters closed up again, that none should know the story.

And that was the end of what he thought, for when Lilian next spoke to him he lay dead in his chair beside her.

B. S.



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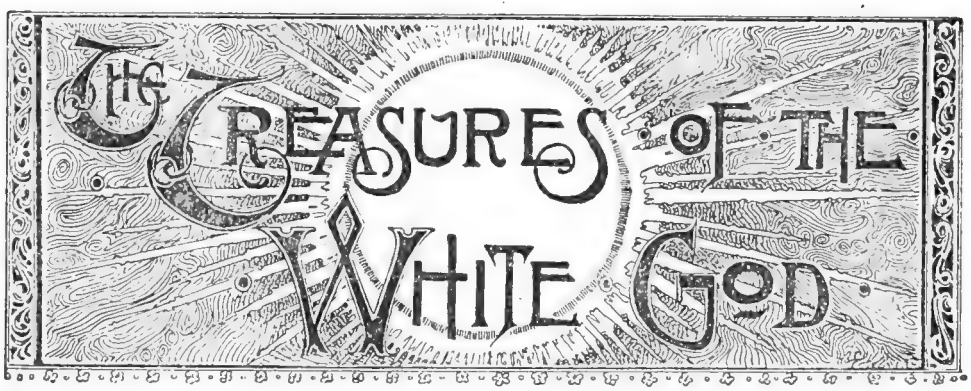

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In the White Moonlight.

"Your property! your slave!" stammered Burgoyne incoherently, and with alarm. "You forget, señor, I am a citizen of a foreign country. Your laws cannot apply to me. I can appeal to the English of the American government——"

There Adrian Burgoyne paused. In a flash he realised his helplessness. *He* appeal to the laws of a country that had set a price upon him as one of its violaters! How? As Adrian Burgoyne—as convict 407—under a new name? How establish a right to that name—his claim to a false identity? Ah! the past might be dead, but its later issues still lived to confront, defy, complicate.

"We constitute law around these diggings," announced the Mexican. "March him to the mine, place him in charge of the overseer," he concluded to his friend.

"As you say, Fuertado. Come, señor, we are too strong for you. We are short-handed at the mine, too. Ten dollars will soon be worked out."

"Ten dollars!" repeated Burgoyne bitterly. "You value your accommodations highly."

"Only one for that," smiled Fuertado, with a covert sneer; "the other nine dollars cover the saving of your life."

There was no help for it. The men had him in a close trap, and to struggle, to defy, to debate, was useless. They were armed. They had half-a-dozen slaves at their command to pursue him if he fled.

A month—thirty days of servitude, solitude, delay! The work he did not mind, the close cynosure of a brutal overseer he was used to, but the delay! Why, in a month!—Colonel Lytle had promised Richard Sheldon to complete his Mexican mission, and place the secreted Ringold fortune in his hands before that term of time had elapsed.

"I will feign to become a willing worker, will throw the overseer off his guard by seeming submission, and in a day or two make a dash for liberty," planned Burgoyne hopefully.

More easily said than done, however, was this, for he was set to work in an excavation far under the surface, and it had but one exit, and that continually guarded by the overseer.

At night he and the half-breeds were marched to a log shed, with barred doors and grated windows, and outside, all the night through, a burly favourite of Fuertado worked for eventual liberty, by watching to nip out any plan for escape with a bullet from the revolver he carried.

Thus two days passed by. On the evening of the third, just as Burgoyne was beginning to despair of escape, and was divided between open defiance of his tyrant masters and a philosophical submission to their will for the prescribed month, something occurred that aroused him with a rude shock from his apathetic dejection and uncertainty, and started every nerve in his frame vibrating to all the old-time vigour and intrepidity.

He lay that night in his hard board bunk, unable to sleep, and revolving plan after plan in his active mind for escape. His companions, done out with their hard labours of the day, were snoring loudly. So near was Burgoyne to the log wall of the shed that he could glance out through an interstice where the clay filling had dried and fallen away, and could make out the armed sentinel pacing up and down on his solitary beat.

Dreamily, mechanically, observing the moonlit expanse through his little port-hole of observation, he started into deeper interest as two forms advanced from the direction of Fuertado's hut.

One of them he instantly recognised as its proprietor. He held an open letter in his hand, as if his companion had just brought it, and its reading had paved the way for a stroll and the seeking of a secluded spot where they could discuss its merits, free from the prying attention of the overseer and the other regular denizens of the place.

"Here, señor, be seated. We will be free from all eavesdroppers here," spoke the Mexican, in his blandest tones, and halting just within the peering Burgoyne's range of vision, and indicating a long wooden box set on edge.

"Mercy—it is he—Lytle!"

Adrian Burgoyne sprang up in his bunk, and glued his eyes to the interstice between the logs, and lingered there, rapt, amazed, discrediting the evidence of his visual senses.

It could be no delusion. Fuertado's companion was his old-time enemy, the same sinister-faced, suave scoundrel as of yore. There was no change in his appearance beyond the ordinary, save that he had affected a border swagger, and wore the conventional sombrero of the country he was in.

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"Well, Mr. Fuertado," said Lytle, "how does the letter strike you?"

Every word he spoke was distinctly audible to the eager and engrossed listener, shielded from view not ten feet distant by only the thickness of a log wall.

"Excellently, señor—most excellently!" chirped the polite Fuertado. "My friend Mendonca knows me as a trusted neighbour. His will is law. He bids me extend all aid possible to you. You have but to command!"

"That is for money, of course?" laughed Lytle bluntly. "See here, Fuertado! I am a plain, outspoken Yankee."

"Admirable nation! I welcome you, señor," commended the Mexican, with overwhelming courtesy.

"Very good. I am here on a mission."

"So Mendonca states."

"As agent and representative of the great World's Fair at Chicago."

"We have heard of it, señor."

"I come with influential introductions to State and clergy, with an abundance of means, and with a coterie of servants, or, rather guards. My point of interest in and about Guayli is the cave of Bureldo."

"Ah! the Aztec house of mysteries?"

"Exactly. I wish to inspect its numberless curiosities I wish to purchase what curios I can. Failing in that, I am anxious to photograph its treasures, to make up a collection for the Mexican exhibit in the great Columbian Exposition."

"A truly philanthropic and public-spirited motive," commented the fulsome Mexican.

"Very good. I arrive three days since. The government officer at Guayli treats me handsomely. He helps me on the first step of my way, by insuring a warm welcome from the priests at the San Miguel monastery. They hear my story. I am taken to the Aztec priest in charge of the cave of Bureldo. He is very friendly; with all the idiotic, clinging superstitions of dead ages, he is still very keen and clever. He offers me a lot of common, worthless curiosities, but when I offer to pay an immense, an exorbitant price for some of his stone idols, noticeably the celebrated White God, old Medeiras, as he calls himself, lifts his hands in holy horror, and cries out, 'Sacrilege!'"

"They are very tenacious of their past traditions and mementoes, these Aztec desendants," vouchsafed Fuertado.

"However," resumed Lytle, "he had no particular objection to my photographing with my camera some of their deities. He will allow myself and what assistants I require to enter the sacred cave. The day after to-morrow is the time apportioned for this visit."

"Ah! then your object is gained?" murmured the Mexican carelessly, but watching his guest with a furtive, insinuating glance.

"Yes and no," responded Lytle vaguely.

"Yes and no! Rather ambiguous, señor, is it not?"

"Yes, because I gain admittance to the cave. No, because I imagine Medeiras will only allow me to see a few of his rarities. These fellows are very conservative and tricky. Now, then, I want free access to all the curiosities of the cave."

"Señor," interrupted Fuertado, with a covert, crafty grin, "be the blunt Yankee you profess! Truth to tell, you desire an opportunity to secrete a few of those self-same curios, unnoticed, eh?"

"Well, perhaps," winked Lytle. "At any rate, I met your friend, Mendonca. I explained to him what I wanted. He is unable to assist me, but he directed me to you. Now, then, Mr. Fuertado, I will pay you a liberal amount to come under my directions for just two hours the day after to-morrow."

The eyes of the Mexican sparkled with active, crafty cupidity.

"How much, señor?" he demanded eagerly.

"A thousand dollars, current coin, cash down."

"You are generous!" spoke Fuertado, his face one great glow of expectation and avarice.

"Then I can count upon you?"

"It is a bargain! As I said before, Mendonca is my trusted friend. He sends you to me. Command me; I am yours."

"Very well; you will come to the San Miguel Monastery to see me the day after to-morrow morning. You will come prepared to act."

"In what way, señor?"

"At noon, accompanied only by the Aztec high priest——"

"Medeiras?"

"Yes, myself and my *photographing* party"—and Lytle gave a significant and emphatic sneering intonation to the word—"will enter the cave of Bureldo. Our explorations will consume, say, three hours. At present only a few women, whom we do not fear, guard the entrance to the cave in a perfunctory sort of a way."

"Where are the men?" asked Fuertado.

"Gone, most of them, luckily for my plans, to a religious celebration across the mountains."

"I understand!"

"About a score are at home. It is these I want you to keep out of the way, from noon until dusk, the day after to-morrow."

"Ah! and you care not how?"

"Not I."

"A little drugged pulque will settle their cases. You can rely on me, señor. They shall be inactive, helpless, at the time you name, and I shall never be suspected of having a hand in it."

"I can rely on you?"

"Implicitly."

"Then I shall place in Mendonca's hands, to-night the one thousand dollars, to be paid when your task is faithfully executed."

"To-night? Can you not remain and partake of my hospitality until the morning?"

"No, thanks. My plans require my presence at San Miguel."

The two men moved away, Fuertado accompaning Lytle as far as a little thicket near by, where his horse was tethered.

The wondering and excited Burgoyne saw his old-time enemy mount a mustang and disappear along the narrow mountain path. Then Fuertado returned, slowly and thoughtfully.

He paused near the shed again, and whistled.

The man on guard came instantly to his side.

"You signalled me, señor?" he questioned servilely.

"Yes. Go to the hacienda and send Pedro here. Then keep out of earshot until we complete our confab."

A few moments later, the man who had assisted Fuertado in rescuing Burgoyne from the quicksand appeared, and he sat down by the side of the Mexican on the self-same box where he had held the colloquy with Colonel Lytle.

Evidently a partner, a friend of Fuertado, the latter proceeded at once to make a confidant and accomplice of him. He detailed the episode of the letter, and repeated his recent conversation with Lytle, word for word.

"Well, Pedro," he queried at its conclusion, "what do you think of it?"

"I think—a thousand dollars!" laughed the other.

"Yes, but what is the Yankee up to?"

"What matters it, so that we get our pay?" asked Pedro.

"I wish I knew!" persisted Fuertado.

"I can surmise."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Out with it, then!"

"He is after some valuable relic or curio in the wave."

"Very probably," admitted the Mexican.

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"He will take forcible possession of it, overpowering Medeiras."

"And then?"

"Fly with it. In doing so, he will have to pass the guards at the entrance to the cave."

"But they are only a lot of old women at the present time?"

"He counts on that. They cannot deter him, resist, or fight. He fears only the men. If you have them under control, drugged and helpless, he will be able to escape."

"I imagine you are correct, Pedro," announced Fuertado speculatively. "As you say, what matters it to us how many of those hideous old stone idols he steals. Only—"

"Eh? you have a thought?"

"A bright one."

"Then it means?"

"Two thousand dollars, instead of one."

"Speak!" urged the Mexican's companion.

"I know a secret exit from the cave."

"You do?"

"Yes; with a knowledge of that, the Yankee can escape at his leisure, and without being observed. Would he not pay another thousand for the information, think you?"

"Fuertado, you are a genius! Tell me! Where is this secret outlet?"

In detail the Mexican awarded the required explanation. In detail, point for point, the eager listening Adrian Burgoyne memorised the valuable information.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, as the two men moved away towards the hut, "I know all—a secret way to the cave, all the plans of Lytle; another day and I shall be too late. It must not be. I must escape, and to-night, at all hazards!"

He glanced through his loop-hole of observation once more.

Perfect silence and serenity held the scene. One human barrier to liberty alone was in view—the solitary sentinel, pacing his confined beat in the white moonlight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The White God.

He must escape!—but how?

So often during his brief confinement had Adrian Burgoyne mentally discussed every feasible plan looking to liberty, that it seemed like going over a well-worn road to cast up the chances of this and that scheme.

He waited patiently for an hour. The lights of the hut had been put out. Its denizens were probably asleep. The sentinel, smoking a cigarette, was swinging indolently in a hammock strung between two trees; but as he slept all day, Burgoyne knew that he would maintain a surveillance over the shed all night long.

It would be impossible to break out of the shed without attracting the guard's attention. The door was stoutly barred on the outside; the window was grated with broad bands of hoop iron, sunk and looped into the woodwork at the sides. Burgoyne had about abandoned all hopes for a dash for liberty until morning, when fortune, a trivial circumstance, favoured his plans immensely.

One of the sleepers moved uneasily; then he began to groan. Then he woke up, uttered a howl of pain, and this instantly grew into cries of horror and alarm.

The disturbing sounds aroused the sentinel. He came up to the door of the shed.

"What is that?" he demanded sharply.

"Manuel!" groaned the unhappy sufferer. "I am ill, dying. I drank of the surface water in the digging to allay my thirst. It has given me the fever."

The fever! The guard knew what that meant. He realised, too, its deadly contact. An expert in such things, he insisted on an immediate examination of the patient, quarantine, isolation, if he, indeed, betrayed active symptoms of a disease that attacks at morn, and leaves its victim stark and stiff at high noon.

"Wait!" he spoke. "I will come in and see you. I will light the lantern. Do not disturb the others. It will cause a panic. It may be only a passing pang of pain."

This, just beyond the door, and the bar rattled.

Adrian Burgoyne glided across the dark structure. He got just at the side of the door, and crouched back into the shadow and shelter of the thick post, forming a part of its massive frame-work.

The door opened, and the sentinel, after listening for a moment, strode across the room. The snoring of the sleepers reassured him.

"I will soon have a light," he said.

Swift as an eagle, Adrian Burgoyne made a forward swoop. He was across the rude threshold in a flash.

Slam!—he drew the oaken portal shut. Crash—the bar shot into the grooves, closing in the keeper of prisoners, a prisoner himself.

Then he sped for the near timber, unheeding the cries of the sentinel, his shrill signal whistle of alarm for the overseer and the other denizens of the hut, calculating only to keep out of range of the barred window, through which a shot might stop his flight.

If there was pursuit, it never neared his trail. Straight as an arrow he set his course for the cave of Bureldo. He minded not weariness or exhaustion. He had a mission to perform, and a speedy one.

Time was the essence of his plans. Within forty-eight hours Colonel Lytle would possess the White God and its precious contents, unless he anticipated him.

At bare daylight Adrian Burgoyne crawled into a dense copse, and flung himself upon the ground, too wearied to keep his eyes open. Thorns had penetrated his insufficient foot-covering, the brambles, the sharp-pointed rocks, had rent his attire in pieces. He had lost his hat in a fall dangerously near to the edge of an enormous pit, but—he had arrived!

Within a few hundred yards he made out a peculiar rock formation, which Fuertado had described as the position of the secret entrance to the cave. It was only a matter of rest, recuperation; then he would essay an expedition into the bowels of the mountain.

It was several hours later when Burgoyne awoke. He was not afraid of intruders in that desolate spot. A few nuts and berries served for a meal. Then he traversed the base of the mountain, in search of the aperture that led into the cave.

"This must be it," murmured the searcher, as he pulled aside a dense growth of vines, revealing a yawning gap in the rocks beneath.

The flare of a match within the darksome void that Burgoyne now penetrated, revealed the fact that at some remote time the subterranean gallery had been employed as an exit from the cave. As if to verify the conjecture, secured around a stone was a hempen cord, apparently a guide-string, and, seizing it, Burgoyne groped his way forward.

It was damp and rotten, and had certainly been unused for some time, but he followed its course. But for it he would have been at loss how to proceed, for, further on, the gallery he was traversing diverged into numerous smaller avenues.

His last match was employed for a survey around, as, with a jarring fall, he stumbled down a steep slant in the path, the cord breaking in his grasp. The situation now alarmed him. He groped confusedly about to regain and reunite the severed strands, but could indentify neither. Bewildered by the dense darkness, he wandered aimlessly about. At last he selected a path leading straight ahead, and somewhat concernedly realising that the most difficult portion of his task would be to find his way again out of the perplexing labyrinth he had so rashly penetrated.

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"I must rest. It seems endless groping — unvarying darkness!" murmured the wearied wanderer at last.

He sat braced against a rock, and dozing when a sudden commotion, faint but reverberating, aroused him.

Human voices and the sound of some sweet-stringed instruments were mingled in a chanting, sing-song rhythm. Then a dim glow shifted across the walls of rock about him.

Looking straight ahead, at the end of the gallery he was in, Adrian Burgoyne made out moving forms. The light grew stronger. Human beings, arrayed in priestly garb and bearing torches, were visible in an immense, cave-like apartment, marching about, and bowing and chanting to numberless idols set upon pedestals of wood and stone.

Adrian Burgoyne drew a long, deep breath of interest and satisfaction. He had penetrated to the cave of the Aztec—he had reached his goal, the self-same solitude where his dead friend, Ralph Ringold, had lurked a hunted fugitive, seven years ago, and where he had stowed away his treasure!

The voices died away, the stringed instruments were silenced, the glare of light grew dim.

Creeping to the remote end of the gallery, Burgoyne gazed after the retreating procession.

A single glow now permeated the subterranean apartment. As he strained his vision he made out that it proceeded from an ancient silver lamp. Within it lay oil and a wick, and this latter sputtered fitfully.

He made his way towards it. Then he glanced up at the idol in whose honour, it seemed, it was kept burning.

Awe, wonder, checked his pulses as he looked; a vague mysterious emotion enchained his senses as he realised that he viewed the blank, patient face of a Deity older than Montezuma—a veritable heir of the ages, the mute, dumb witness of all the splendour, terror and mystery of the rich courts of the ancient Aztecs!

The old and the new joined hands across the abyss of the centuries. His long quest was ended—his mission all but accomplished.

For Adrian Burgoyne knew that the dazzling white form that looked down upon him was none other than the oldest idol in the world—the famous White God!

CHAPTER XXV.

A Mighty Cost.

Birds of a feather, utterly soulless, crafty and cruel the Mexican, Fuertado, and Colonel Lytle had little difficulty in coming to a distinct and harmonious understanding.

The day succeeding that upon which Adrian Burgoyne made his escape from peon servitude, the plots of Richard Sheldon's emissary were ripe for execution.

At noon, as he had previously arranged, accompanied by four ruffianly-looking cohorts, whose services he had secured upon arriving in Mexico, Lytle appeared at the entrance to the cave of Bureldo, and, at the same hour, the villainous Fuertado was industriously engaged in administering drugged pulque to the few able-bodied men left in the Aztec camp.

Medeiras, the priest, met Lytle at the cave. He was a young man, but his early training, his earnest appreciation of the king-like attributes of priesthood, had left a deep impress on his classic face. All truth, sincerity and seriousness, his deep devotion to a dead religion was a commendable example to many more highly educated in a more meritorious cause. To him, the fading glories of an almost extinct race held a glamour that idealised the cave of Bureldo into a storehouse of antiquity and tradition more precious than a regal palace of rare magnificence.

Arrayed in his priestly robes, and alone, he ushered his visitors into the cave.

Torches had been set about to illuminate the dark interior. He exhibited many strange and curious relics; he even pressed several upon Lytle as a gift, but, with ill-concealed eagerness, the schemer insisted on seeing and photographing the idols.

Had Medeiras been more experienced in the progress of science, he would have known that the manœuvres of Lytle were a weak feint. It was impossible to take photographs without the aid of a flash-light in the cave, but Lytle went through all the movements with his camera. His sinister eye glittered covetously as he finally came to the White God.

Affairs had reached a climax. The receptacle of a princely fortune, to secure which he had travelled thousands of miles, was before him.

He made a significant movement to his assistants. They feigned an awe at the presence of the famous idol that gratified the high priest. Then Lytle said:

"The famous White God?"

"Yes," replied Medeiras—"our mightiest and holiest possession. Few, except priestly devotees, are allowed to view it, but the monks at San Miguel recommend you as a friend."

"I must photograph it," spoke Lytle.

Medeiras bowed.

"There is scarcely light enough, however. Would you secure another torch?"

The priest murmured an accommodating assent. He started back the way they had come, alone.

"To work!" ordered Lytle promptly, to his companions.

He knew that Medeiras would be out of view of the idol for some moments, the nearest torch being several hundred yards distant.

Immediately the four men who had accompanied Lytle reached under their coats and produced as many bags.

The White God was a squat figure, perhaps three feet high, and weighing some two hundred pounds.

It was formed of some white, shining substance, resembling gypsum, and stood upon a pedestal of blue marble.

In a twinkling the men tore it from its stand. One bag enveloped it, the other three were strapped about it, and a rope was whipped across the bulky parcel, so that it could be readily carried away.

At just the moment when they had completed their nefarious work the priest, Medeiras, reappeared, bearing the torch in his hand.

The flaring stick went nervelessly from his grasp as he viewed the pedestal, bereft of its accustomed deity.

"Sacrilege!" he fairly screamed. "The White God!"

A terrible look in his calm, flashing eyes, he raised a whistle to his lips that would have sounded a speedy alarm to his friends at the entrance to the cave.

Ere he could give utterance to the warning, however, Lytle raised a small leaden stick he had quickly taken from his pocket.

A cruel blow fell across the dusky, classic brow of the fanatic priest. He went down like a shot, bleeding, prone and senseless, lay inert at the base of the pedestal that had been ravished of its sacred guardian.

"Now, to leave the cave. Quick!" ordered Lytle to his accomplices. "Get away from the camp to the horses. Remember, two hundred dollars to each one of you if I reach the Valdis range by nightfall, with the idol, safe!"

The men took up the idol by the ropes and sped towards the entrance to the cave.

Lytle leading, they came out into the light of day again.

A score or more of women and children gathered there, stared vaguely at them—suspiciously at the bulky object the men bore wrapped up in the sacks.

"Go straight ahead," directed Lytle, in an undertone. "I will attend to these old hags, if they make any disturbance."

His cruel, calculating eye viewed an approaching woman

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grimly as she advanced, and his hand stole to his coat pocket and clasped a revolver there.

"Medeiras?" spoke the woman sententiously.

"Oh! your priest?" returned Lytle, with affected carelessness.

"Yes; he has not returned."

"Oh! he, he——"

A glib lie was ready on the schemer's lips. Its utterance was checked, however, for at that moment, from the recesses of the cave there echoed a shrill, piercing whistle.

Instantly every member of the Aztec group sprang from the ground. With lowering, excited faces they advanced towards Lytle.

"Confusion!" breathed the latter. "He has recovered—the signal of warning!"

"Medeiras! Treachery! Sacrilege!" shouted a dozen voices.

"Stand back!" ordered Lytle.

The women seized cudgels and other missiles. A fierce hail of stones assailed the retreating Lytle.

"I've got to do it," he hissed grimly. "Luckily I brought it with me."

Crash!

He drew a tin spherical object from his pocket suddenly. He gave it a forward fling, and then, nimbly putting a great rock between himself and his pursuers, started to overtake his emissaries.

A blinding glare, a paralysing shock, an explosion that echoed and re-echoed through the far hills like a peal of thunder, made all Nature recoil and shudder.

Frantic, fearful cries of agony rent the scene, next. One glance only the ruthless assassin cast upon the writhing, mutilated masses of humanity into the midst of which he had cast the explosive.

Then, all unmindful of the wreck and ruin he had wrought, he hurried on to his companions.

They rounded the mountain and came to their horses. The idol was secured to a mule, the cavalcade pushed forward.

"Ten miles," soliloquised the triumphant plotter; "the train—the border—then home—a royal fortune!"

Whiz—thud!

An ominous sound made the horses start, and caused the men to glance about and above them in sudden alarm.

"What was that?" demanded Lytle sharply.

"An arrow!"

The man who replied pointed to a tree. An arrow, shot from some hidden covert, still quivered where it had struck.

As he pointed, a second weapon grazed the speaker's head and drew blood.

"Look!" cried another member of the party.

Gazing aloft along the side of the mountain, for a moment Colonel Lytle stood transfixed.

They had been rounding the hill in which was situated the Aztec cave.

From a ledge of this eminence, some forty yards above them, the arrows had been directed.

They evidently constituted the sole armament of the attacking party, for, glancing thither, Lytle caught sight of a man holding a bow in his hand, and waving it menacingly at them, in lieu of further weapons of attack.

"Medeiras!" muttered Lytle, with a malignant scowl. "He may make us trouble yet."

No; a moment sufficed to indicate that the high priest of the cave abandoned all hopes of preventing the theft of the White God and the escape of its despoilers.

The blood from Lytle's blow still drenching his face, he glared down upon his enemy with eyes the schemer would never forget—so accusing, so fierce, so resentful was their gleam.

"Hark you!" he cried, and his voice rang out clear as a clarion note on that still afternoon air. "You plotter, thief, and assassin, you have bereft us of our most revered deity; you have stricken our women and children in cowardly murder; you have fled unscathed, but the end is not yet!"

"Fire—shoot down the prating infidel," cried Lytle angrily, with all the zeal of a religious enthusiast—but of an enthusiast whose god is gold.

A fusilade of bullets tattooed upon the rocks about the priest, Medeiras, but, by drawing back into some secret passage-way by which he had reached the mountain-side from the cave, Medeiras evaded the deadly leaden hail.

"Drive on!" ordered Lytle. "Hasten—we have no time to spare!"

The cavalcade started forward again, but, ere they rounded the rocks that led to the valley below, from the mountain side rang forth a second anathema.

"Go upon your blood-red course!" came the stern, thrilling message. "You thief, murderer, sacrilegious monster! Go back to the proud, disdainful people who laugh at us, who will call your base theft clever, because we are downtrodden, and poor, and obscure! But, mark you! though your countrymen entrench you behind ramparts of steel, though you hide in the uttermost parts of the earth, the avenger of the White God shall seek you out, shall find you, shall drink your heart's blood, drop for drop. By the spirit of Montezuma, I swear it; Lytle—I know your name! It is written in hateful characters of murderous scarlet across my heart. Lytle!—tremble! beware! for the destiny that marks you as a victim to the avenger of blood shall never waver or falter in its purpose until your base, cowardly life has paid the forfeit of vengeance to the devotees of the White God!"

"Oh, I say, this boaster's ranting is monotonous!" cried Lytle, but with a slight shudder at the ringing echo of the ominous threat.

One week later, with a sigh of infinite relief, Colonel Lytle paid off his unscrupulous emissaries on the banks of the Rio Grande.

The next day, with the White God safe in a hermetically sealed iron box, he took his seat in a Pullman, to follow it, and tranquilly puffed away at his cigar, with the satisfaction and contentment of a noble warrior returning from a victorious battlefield.

A brief telegram had preceded him.

It was directed to Richard Sheldon, and it read:

"I have succeeded. The White God is ours!"

(To be continued.)

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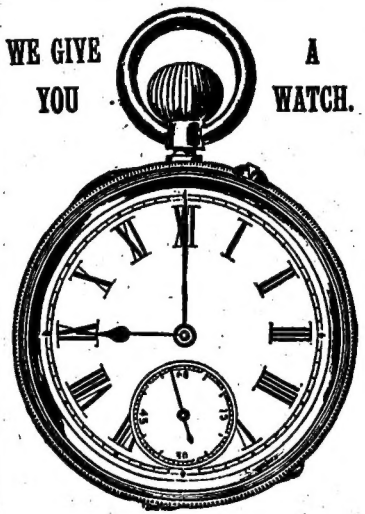

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